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SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF LITERATURE ETHICS AND ROLE OF AI IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND RECONSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This systematic literature review examines the intersection of ethics and artificial intelligence (AI) in historical research and reconstruction. As AI technologies are increasingly integrated into the field of historical studies—particularly in the analysis of primary sources, the digitalization of archival materials, and the virtual reconstruction of historical events—the ethical implications of such applications have become a subject of growing concern. This review synthesizes current scholarly discourse on the ethical challenges posed by AI, including issues of bias, historical accuracy, data integrity, privacy, and the potential for historical manipulation. By analysing a range of academic articles, case studies, and theoretical discussions, this paper identifies key ethical dilemmas in the deployment of AI in historical contexts, and evaluates the impact of algorithmic decision-making on the interpretation and presentation of history. Furthermore, the review explores the responsibilities of historians, technologists, and institutions in ensuring the ethical use of AI in historical research. The findings highlight the need for interdisciplinary collaboration to address these ethical challenges, offering recommendations for the development of guidelines and best practices to navigate the complex ethical terrain of AI in historical inquiry. This study contributes to a broader understanding of how AI can enhance historical research while ensuring that its application remains aligned with scholarly and ethical standards.

CC

Key words: *Artificial Intelligence, History, Ethical Challenges, Manipulation*

INTRODUCTION

The integration of artificial intelligence into historical research and reconstruction represents one of the most significant methodological shifts in the humanities in recent decades. As Cain (2024) articulates, "AI is not just a tool but a transformative force, redefining how we study, interpret, and engage with the annals of human history"[1]. This technological revolution has enabled historians to restore ancient texts, uncover hidden patterns in historical data, simulate historical events, and create immersive historical environments that transform how we engage with the past. Babin (2024) envisions this transformation as allowing us to experience "history not as a passive observer reading from a textbook but as an active participant in a virtual environment"[2].

However, alongside these unprecedented opportunities come significant ethical challenges. The "black box" problem of AI transparency, the risk of creating false historical narratives through deepfakes, bias reproduction in algorithmic processing, and questions surrounding the appropriate boundaries of outsourcing historical interpretation to machines all require careful consideration. As AI applications in historical studies continue to expand, establishing ethical frameworks and best practices becomes increasingly urgent.

This systematic literature review aims to analyze the current scholarly discourse surrounding the ethics and role of AI in historical research and reconstruction, identifying key debates, consensus views, gaps in understanding, and directions for future research. By synthesizing diverse perspectives from history, computer science, digital humanities, and ethics, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive foundation for researchers and practitioners navigating this rapidly evolving interdisciplinary field.

OBJECTIVES

This systematic review aims to:

1. Identify and analyse the primary ethical considerations in AI-assisted historical research and reconstruction as presented in scholarly literature
2. Evaluate the current and potential roles of AI in transforming historical methodology
3. Synthesize best practices and ethical guidelines emerging from interdisciplinary discourse
4. Identify significant gaps in current research and promising directions for future inquiry

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

The significance of this systematic review lies in its contribution to establishing ethical frameworks and methodological best practices at a critical juncture in the evolution of historical studies. As historical research

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increasingly incorporates AI technologies, clear ethical guidelines become essential for maintaining scholarly integrity while embracing technological innovation. This research addresses the tension between technological possibility and ethical responsibility, providing researchers with a comprehensive analysis of current thinking on these issues.

The review is especially timely given the rapid acceleration of AI capabilities and their application to historical studies. Without thoughtful consideration of ethical implications, there exists significant risk that AI applications may inadvertently distort historical understanding or reproduce existing biases. By synthesizing diverse perspectives on these issues, this review aims to inform more responsible integration of AI into historical practice while acknowledging both the transformative potential and ethical challenges of these technologies.

Furthermore, this study contributes to broader discussions about the relationship between humanities and technology, offering insights relevant to other fields experiencing similar technological transformations.

METHODOLOGY

Search Strategy and Inclusion Criteria

This systematic review employed a comprehensive search strategy across multiple academic databases including JSTOR, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library, and specialized digital humanities repositories. The search utilized the following key terms and their combinations: "artificial intelligence," "machine learning," "historical research," "digital humanities," "historical reconstruction," "ethics," "historical simulation," and "computational history." The search was limited to peer-reviewed academic publications from 2014-2025 to capture contemporary discourse while acknowledging the rapidly evolving nature of AI technology.

Screening and Analysis Process

The initial search yielded 378 potentially relevant publications. Following the PRISMA methodology for systematic reviews, publications underwent a two-phase screening process. First, titles and abstracts were screened based on relevance to the research questions, resulting in 124 publications for full-text review. The second screening applied more stringent inclusion criteria, focusing on articles that substantially addressed both AI applications in historical research and associated ethical considerations. This resulted in a final corpus of 63 publications for in-depth analysis.

Analytical Framework

Content analysis of the selected publications utilized a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative thematic analysis identified recurring themes and debates, while quantitative analysis tracked publication trends, disciplinary perspectives, and citation patterns. Publications were coded according to a framework addressing: primary AI technologies discussed, historical applications examined, ethical concerns raised, proposed solutions or guidelines, and disciplinary orientation. This multi-faceted analysis allowed for the identification of consensus views, emerging debates, and gaps in current literature.

Theoretical Framework

Intersection of History, Ethics, and Technology

This systematic review is situated at the intersection of three theoretical domains: historical epistemology, applied ethics in technology, and digital humanities theory. Historical epistemology provides the foundation for understanding how knowledge about the past is constituted, verified, and transmitted. As Megill (2007) argues, historical knowledge is inherently interpretive, constructed through careful analysis of evidence within contexts shaped by present concerns [3]. The introduction of AI into historical methodology fundamentally challenges traditional epistemological assumptions by introducing non-human agents into the interpretive process.

Applied ethics in technology offers frameworks for evaluating the moral dimensions of technological innovation. Drawing on both consequentialist and deontological traditions, this domain addresses questions of responsibility, transparency, and value alignment in technological systems. Floridi's (2019) information ethics provides particularly relevant perspective, conceptualizing ethical problems in terms of the "infosphere" where boundaries between human and artificial agents become increasingly blurred [4].

Digital Humanities Theoretical Perspectives

Digital humanities theory bridges these domains by examining how computational methods transform humanities scholarship. Scholars like Berry (2019) have argued that digital methods constitute not merely tools but fundamentally new ways of knowing that require critical reflection [5]. The "computational turn" in historical studies represents what Drucker (2012) terms a "paradigm shift" that transforms both methodology and the epistemological foundations of the discipline [6].

This review synthesizes these theoretical perspectives to develop an integrated framework for understanding the ethical dimensions of AI in historical research. The framework acknowledges the dynamic tension between historical fidelity, technological possibility, and ethical responsibility. It recognizes that AI applications in history involve negotiations between human and machine agency, raising fundamental questions about authority, interpretation, and the nature of historical knowledge itself. This theoretical orientation informs the subsequent analysis of literature, highlighting how various scholars have conceptualized and addressed these complex intersections.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

AI Applications in Historical Research and Reconstruction

The literature reveals diverse applications of AI in historical studies, with several domains emerging as particularly significant. Text analysis represents one of the most established applications, with machine learning algorithms processing historical documents at unprecedented scale. As Arora et al. (2013) demonstrate, topic modelling techniques have enabled historians to identify patterns across vast corpora that would be impossible to analyse manually [7]. Piotrowski (2012) has utilized natural language processing to trace the evolution of concepts across historical periods, revealing subtle shifts in meaning and usage [8].

Image analysis constitutes another major domain, with computer vision algorithms identifying and categorizing visual elements in historical photographs, artwork, and artifacts. Mathias et al. (2025) highlight how these techniques have transformed archaeological analysis, automatically identifying and classifying artifacts from site photographs.[9] Similarly, Lang and Ommer demonstrate how computational tools enable researchers to establish connections between thousands of images, identify artistic influences, and generate new perspectives on artworks that would be impossible with traditional methods.

Virtual reality offers a transformative solution for enhancing museum accessibility for individuals with mobility impairments. As Tiribelli et al. (2024) explain, VR technology creates immersive digital environments that enable people with physical disabilities to explore museum spaces and engage with cultural content without physical travel constraints. These virtual environments facilitate not only independent navigation through exhibition spaces but also social interaction with other visitors, regardless of geographic location. The authors note that immersive AR and VR experiences can generate an authentic sense of presence and embodiment within cultural settings, allowing individuals with disabilities to participate in cultural experiences that might otherwise remain inaccessible to them. Working on VR and AR, Shehade, Maria and Lambert provide a valuable perspective on virtual reality in museums by focusing on the experiences of museum professionals rather than visitors or technical developers. The research reveals that while VR offers powerful immersive experiences that can attract new audiences, many museums use it only temporarily due to financial constraints and the lack of a comprehensive digital strategy. A particularly interesting finding is that social isolation—where VR cuts visitors off from companions and the museum environment—emerges as a major concern for professionals [11].

Mintz and Stevan (2024) emphasized how AI can personalize the learning experience by adapting content to individual student interests and abilities, while also making cross-disciplinary connections. What's particularly noteworthy is Mintz's balance between technological enthusiasm and pedagogical purpose—AI serves as a facilitator rather than a replacement for historical thinking. By creating carefully curated collections enhanced with AI-driven insights, educators can make historical study more engaging, accessible, and meaningful for diverse learners [12].

Historical simulation and reconstruction represent perhaps the most ambitious applications. Gavin and Michael (2014) explore how agent-based modelling (ABM) can be applied to historical research, particularly literary history. Gavin argues that ABM offers a unique approach to historical understanding by allowing researchers to simulate and test theories about historical processes. Rather than claiming that simulations represent reality, he suggests they represent our ideas about reality - creating functioning systems based on theoretical models to see if they produce patterns similar to historical data [13]. Meanwhile, Babin (2024) describes immersive virtual reconstructions that allow users to experience historical environments through augmented and virtual reality, transforming historical education from passive reading to active engagement.

Ethical Challenges and Considerations

The literature identifies several persistent ethical challenges in AI-assisted historical research. Transparency and interpretability emerge as fundamental concerns, with numerous scholars highlighting what Cain (2023) terms the "black box problem" in AI systems [14]. While Loi, Michele, et al. argue that transparency should be reconceptualized as "design publicity" - explaining algorithms as intentional products designed to serve specific goals within particular domains. This approach emphasizes three key transparency elements: value (communicating the algorithm's goals), translation (explaining how goals are operationalized), and performance (demonstrating how well the algorithm achieves these goals) [15].

Bias reproduction represents another significant ethical challenge. Historical data inherently reflects the biases of past societies and record-keeping practices, privileging certain perspectives while marginalizing others. Leslie and David (2020) demonstrate how AI systems trained on such data risk amplifying these biases, potentially reinforcing rather than challenging problematic historical narratives. Their research shows how facial recognition systems trained on historical photograph collections demonstrated significant bias in identifying individuals from marginalized groups [16].

Similarly, the presumed objectivity of artificial intelligence systems is increasingly being challenged by scholars examining the cultural implications of technology deployment. Tiribelli et al. (2024) emphasize this concern specifically for cultural heritage contexts, asserting that "AI technologies are never neutral: they embed directly or indirectly socio-political, economic, and cultural values and agendas which can improperly affect cultural heritage. Challenges such as incorrect interpretation, historical and cultural biases, and economic and cognitive

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discrimination can counterbalance benefits provided by AI to one of the finest forms of human expression: art and creativity" (p. 294). This perspective highlights the tension between technological advancement and cultural preservation, suggesting that without careful ethical consideration, AI applications may undermine the very heritage they aim to enhance [17].

The emergence of artificial intelligence in historical scholarship presents unique ethical challenges that traditional frameworks struggle to address. Hughes-Warrington (2025) articulates this fundamental shift by noting that "artificial historians do not need to have intentions to complete actions or to solve problems. Consequently, a revised approach to the ethics of history is needed" (p. 1) [18]. This observation highlights the decoupling of intent from action in AI-generated historical content, necessitating new ethical considerations that move beyond traditional notions of historian responsibility and accountability.

When examining the logical structures that underpin historical writing, Hughes-Warrington (2025) offers valuable insights into how uncertainty functions as an ethical component of historiography. She emphasizes the significance of conditional language, noting that "the important thing about partly constraining operators and erotetic logic is that they do not establish truth-evaluable propositions. They remind us that the past, the present, and the future are not certain, but they also do not offer us all modal possibilities" (p. 17). This observation highlights how quality historical writing exists in a deliberate middle ground—avoiding both absolute certainty and complete relativism—which creates space for ongoing scholarly dialogue and ethical engagement with historical subjects.

The potential for historical misinformation through AI-generated content constitutes a third major ethical concern. Several scholars, including Shahzad, Hina Fatima, et al (2022), highlight the risks posed by generative AI systems capable of creating convincing but historically inaccurate texts, images, and videos. As these technologies become more accessible, the potential for deliberate creation of false historical narratives increases[19]. Johnson and Ahmed (2021) document several cases where deepfake technology was used to create fabricated historical footage, demonstrating the challenges historians face in an era of increasingly sophisticated digital manipulation.

Emerging Best Practices and Ethical Guidelines

In response to these challenges, the literature reveals emerging consensus around several best practices. Transparency about methodological limitations appears as a consistent recommendation, with Chen et al. (2022) arguing that researchers must explicitly acknowledge the boundaries of AI-assisted historical analysis. They propose standardized documentation practices that detail training data, algorithmic design choices, and potential biases for AI systems used in historical research.

Human-AI collaboration models represent another area of consensus. Rather than outsourcing historical interpretation entirely to machines, scholars like Harrison and Patel (2023) advocate for "augmented intelligence" approaches where AI systems support rather than replace human judgment. Their work demonstrates how collaborative human-AI systems outperformed both human experts and AI systems working independently on tasks of historical analysis, suggesting complementary strengths.

Ethical review processes specifically adapted for digital historical research constitute a third area of emerging best practice. Building on traditions of research ethics in other disciplines, Rodriguez (2022) proposes specialized ethical review frameworks for AI applications in historical studies. These frameworks address not only research conduct but downstream implications of historical AI systems, including potential misuse and social impact.

Donovan, Moira. (2023) explains how by leveraging machine learning and deep neural networks, historians can now analyse vast collections of documents, images, and artifacts with unprecedented depth and breadth. These computational tools enable researchers to uncover hidden patterns, reconstruct social networks, and gain insights that were previously impossible. However, the technology also raises critical ethical questions about bias, accuracy, and the potential for generating false historical narratives. As AI becomes more sophisticated, historians must carefully balance technological innovation with rigorous academic interpretation, ensuring that machine learning enhances rather than replaces human historical analysis [20].

Gaps and Future Directions

Despite substantial progress, significant gaps remain in current literature. First, longitudinal studies assessing the impact of AI-assisted historical research on historical understanding remain scarce. While numerous studies describe methodological applications, fewer examine how these applications transform historical knowledge production over time. Second, perspectives from historically marginalized communities are underrepresented in discussions of AI ethics in historical research. As Abdullah Alsaleh (2024) argue, ethical frameworks must incorporate diverse cultural perspectives on history, memory, and technology to avoid reproducing existing power imbalances [21].

The literature also identifies several promising directions for future research. Cross-disciplinary collaboration between historians, computer scientists, and ethicists emerges as particularly important for addressing complex challenges at disciplinary boundaries. Additionally, Rogers and Lin (2022) highlight the need for developing

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historically-specific AI approaches rather than applying general-purpose algorithms to historical materials without adaptation to historical contexts and concerns.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This systematic review has examined the multifaceted relationship between artificial intelligence, historical research, and ethical responsibility. The literature reveals a field in dynamic development, with rapidly evolving technologies intersecting with longstanding questions about historical methodology and ethics. As Cain (2024) aptly notes, "The integration of AI into the study of history is a testament to the interdisciplinary nature of technological innovation," requiring collaboration across traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Several key conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, AI applications in historical research have moved beyond experimental approaches to become increasingly integrated into historical methodology, offering unprecedented capabilities for analysis, interpretation, and representation of the past. Second, ethical challenges including transparency, bias, and potential misrepresentation remain persistent concerns requiring ongoing attention. Third, the field has begun developing ethical frameworks and best practices, though these remain unevenly implemented and continue to evolve as technologies advance.

Future research should address several critical areas. First, greater attention to power dynamics in AI-assisted historical research is needed, examining how these technologies may amplify or challenge existing hierarchies in historical knowledge production. Second, developing technical approaches specifically designed for historical materials rather than adapting general-purpose AI systems would better address the unique challenges of historical data. Third, empirical studies assessing how AI affects historical understanding among both researchers and the public would provide valuable insights into the actual impact of these technologies.

Finally, expanding the diversity of voices in conversations about AI ethics in historical research remains crucial. As historical AI applications increasingly shape public historical understanding, ensuring these systems incorporate diverse perspectives and ethical considerations becomes not merely an academic concern but a matter of social responsibility. The future of AI in historical research holds tremendous promise for expanding our understanding of the past, but realizing this potential requires thoughtful navigation of complex ethical terrain. As Babin (2024) suggests, AI's role in historical research is "just beginning to unfold," with its full potential contingent upon our ability to harness these technologies responsibly and ethically.

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THE INDIC PATH TO EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL WELL BEING: EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS FROM GEN Z STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Indic values Ahimsa (non-violence), Seva (service), Samatva (equanimity), and Atma-jnana (self-awareness) in shaping the emotional well-being of Gen Z college students. Using data from 489 participants, aged 17–24 of 3 academic institutes from Ahmedabad, where emotional wellbeing workshops were regularly conducted during the period (2023-25) were selected as sample. The research explores how culturally rooted Indic values relate to students emotional balance and overall well-being. The results revealed that Samatva recorded the highest mean, suggesting strong emotional stability among students of selected colleges. This finding contrasts with prevailing research portraying Gen Z as highly stressed. This elevated Samatva may reflect the impact of institutional well-being initiatives such as, emotional wellbeing workshops, mindfulness sessions, value-based education, and reflective practices integrated into the curriculum. Gender based analysis revealed that Female students reported higher levels of Samatva (emotional stability) while male students scored higher on Seva and perceptions of a Value-Based Campus Climate. Stream based analysis revealed that Commerce students scored higher on seva , Atma-jnana, and Emotional Intelligence compared to Management and Engineering students. ANOVA results showed no significant differences across age groups or educational levels, indicating that Indic values and emotional well-being capacities are relatively consistent among students. The findings emphasize the potential of integrating traditional value frameworks with contemporary wellbeing efforts to enhance resilience and balance among young adults. The study contributes to the growing research in Indic Knowledge System (IKS) on value based approach to student well-being and underscores the need for holistic, value-oriented educational practices.

Keywords: *Emotional well being, Mental well being, Emotional Intelligence, gen Z, Indian Knowledge system, Indic Values, Ahinsa, Seva, Samatva , Atma-jnana*

1.INTRODUCTION

The emotional and mental wellbeing of youth in India, particularly those belonging to Generation Z (born approximately 1997–2012) and Generation Alpha (born 2013 and later), is a growing concern (Dey,2024). Contemporary research shows that gen Z face unique challenges and pressure driven by technological advancements, shifting social dynamics, and evolving educational demands. They often struggle with anxiety, academic pressure, digital fatigue, and interpersonal conflicts, making emotional well-being a key predictor of academic success and life satisfaction (Arora & Khandelwal, 2022, Dey,2024). World Mental Health Day being observed on Oct 10, Times of India a leading news paper of the country reached out to leading educational institutions in Ahmedabad to understand how students cope with emotional and mental issues .The report after the survey revealed that "on an average, about 25 students seek help monthly, dealing with issues like self-doubt, stress, relationship problems, overt thinking, anxiety, difficulty in connecting with others, and career challenges,"("IIM-A Responds to Student Death, Adds Counselling Support," 2024). Considering this report as an alarm, one of the researcher coordinated emotional wellbeing workshops in colleges and universities to create awareness about emotional wellbeing in youth in collaboration with Saath Suicide prevention centre. The use of workshop-based engagement followed by a questionnaire allowed for meaningful understanding of students perception about Indic value dimensions and emotional wellbeing.

Objectives:

1.To explore the relevance and application of Indic philosophical values Ahimsa (compassion), Seva (service), Samatva (equanimity), and Atma-jnana (self-awareness) in strengthening emotional resilience among gen Z.
2.To develop a culturally rooted framework integrating well being model and Indic values that can support mental well-being in gen Z.
3.To examine whether gender influences the Indic value dimension scores among Z.
4.To investigate the differences in Indic value dimension scores among students from Management, Commerce and Engineering streams.

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5. To propose implications for, educators and policymakers for embedding emotional literacy and value-based education in academic institutes

2.LITERATURE REVIEW:

Emotional well-being includes the capacity to understand, manage, and express emotions effectively, while mental well-being involves psychological resilience, life purpose, and positive functioning(Dr. Surendra Pal Singh, 2024). Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the potential to understand, use, and manage emotions positively to reduce stress, communicate effectively, and resolve conflict and challenges (Traymbak et al., 2022). These components together shape how young adults respond to stress, build relationships, and maintain healthy coping strategies.

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes that students well-being must be an essential part of holistic education, advocating for socio-emotional learning and value-based development as foundational skills for Indian youth (Ministry of Education, 2020) which, aligns with UNESCO's Education 2030 framework of action. This framework emphasizes that education must foster "peace, empathy, and non-violence"[1]

Indic Values and their Psychological Foundations

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) emphasize the cultivation of inner strength, emotional harmony, and ethical conduct among youth (Kapoor, 2021). Core Indic values such as Ahimsa, Seva, Samatva, and Atma-jnana are deeply rooted in Indian philosophical traditions and continue to hold psychological relevance in fostering emotional wellbeing. (Dr. Surendra Pal Singh, 2024)

Ahimsa (Non-violence)

In the Bhagvat Gita, (chapter 16, verse 2) "Ahinsa" is listed among one of the 26 "divine virtues (Dr. Surendra Pal Singh, 2024). Rigved and Jain Philosophy believes that principle of Ahimsa fosters non-violence in thought, speech, and behavior (Shah, n.d.-a) Psychologically, it aligns with emotional regulation, restraint, and compassionate communication (Kapur R 2021). Research shows that non-violent communication fosters emotional stability, reduces interpersonal conflict, and strengthens empathy in educational Institutes.

Seva (Selfless Service and helping behaviour)

Bhagvat Gita explains that "Seva purifies the heart and mind leading to an inner state of bliss." Studies in positive psychology demonstrate that prosocial acts enhance meaning, increase positive emotion, and strengthen social bonds (Aknin et al., 2019). In the Indian context, Seva has been associated with greater life satisfaction and emotional well-being among youth (Mishra, 2023), Student who volunteer in college activities and help fellow students in their assignment generates happy hormones

Samatva (Equanimity)

In the Bhagavad Gītā (6.16–17), Lord Krishna describes Samatva as essential condition of wellbeing. The principle of Samatva represents "balanced mind," which helps to maintain emotional stability and calmness during stressful situations. (Dr. Surendra Pal Singh, 2024) Research in mindfulness and emotion regulation shows that equanimity reduces emotional reactivity, promotes engagement, and enhances resilience (Desbordes et al., 2015).

Atma-jnana (Self-awareness)

According to Vedanta Philosophy Atma-jnana refers to understanding our own emotions and experiences.(Shah M.P, 2025) A student who recognizes their anxiety before a presentation can intentionally slow their breathing, reorganize their thoughts, and speak with greater clarity. This self-awareness prevents panic and enhances their academic performance and classroom participation. Modern psychology identifies self-awareness as a core component of emotional regulation, decision-making, and mental well-being (Silvia & Duval, 2001).

Although Indic values such as Ahimsa, Seva, Samatva, and Atma-jnana are deeply rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems and have been repeatedly highlighted in educational discourse, most academic work in this area remains conceptual rather than empirical. Many scholars describe how these values can nurture emotional maturity, compassion, and inner balance (Kapur, 2021; Mishra, 2023, Dr. Surendra Singh, 2024, Shah M.P 2025), but the majority of these contributions focus on philosophical explanations or conceptual frameworks rather than measurable, data-based evidence. Similarly, much of the research on emotional intelligence and well-being in India draws from Western psychological models and standardized EI scales, with limited integration of culturally grounded Indic values (Sharma, 2022). The present study aims to fill this gap by empirically investigating the relationship between Ahimsa, Seva, Samatva, Atma-jnana, and the emotional and mental well-being of Indian Gen Z students.

3.METHODOLOGY

[1] [1]("Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All," (UNESCO, 2015)

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The study employed a primary data collected from three colleges located in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Two of these institutions are affiliated with Gujarat University, while the third is a private university where emotional well-being workshops were conducted in collaboration with Saath, suicide prevention and emotional support center. One of the researchers is an active volunteer with Saath, which enabled the collaboration and facilitated access to students for the study.

Following the workshops, a post-intervention survey was administered to the students of participating colleges. Data was collected from 489 students using a structured questionnaire specifically developed for this research. The overall structure of the questionnaire aligns with Seligman's PERMA model of well-being (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) which aligns with Indic values (Ahimsa, Seva, Samatva, Atma-jnana) Indic dimensions of emotional and mental well-being.(Kovich et al. 2023, Dr.Surendra pal,2024). The number of items selected for each variable was as follows: Ahinsa (5), Seva (6), samatva (6), Atma Jnana (5), Emotionl Intelligence (7). The collected responses were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistic, reliability analysis, t-test for equality of means and Anova.

4.RESULTS:

Sample Characteristics: Data were collected from N = 489 college students. The sample consisted of 47.2% males and 52.8% females, primarily aged 17–19 years (75.3%). Students represented Commerce (66.5%), Management (24.5%), and Engineering (9.0%) disciplines, with 46.2% from government colleges and 53.8% from private institutions.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics		
	Cronbach's Alpha	**N of Items**
AHIMSA	.727	5
SEVA	.766	6
SAMATVA	.819	6
ATMA_JNANA	.724	5
EI	.785	7
VALUE_BASED EDUCATION	.863	5

Reliability of scales Cronbach's alpha values >(.7) demonstrated acceptable to high internal consistency These reliabilities indicate that the constructs were measured consistently.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AHIMSA	489	1.00	4.20	1.8004	.58918
SEVA	489	1.00	4.67	1.7986	.52827
SAMATVA	489	1.00	4.67	2.1585	.66456
ATMA_JANAN	489	1.00	3.80	1.9763	.59196
EI	489	1.00	4.43	2.0523	.57426
VALUE_BASED	489	1.00	5.00	1.9677	.72249
Valid N (listwise)	489				

Descriptive statistics indicated moderate levels of all Indic values and emotional intelligence among students. Samatva showed the highest mean (M = 2.16), reflecting relatively stronger emotional balance, while Ahimsa, Seva, and Atma-jnana remained moderate (M = 1.79–1.98). Emotional Intelligence (M = 2.05) and Value-Based Campus Climate (M = 1.97) also showed moderate endorsement with some variation across students.

Table: 3 Gender wise descriptive Statistics:

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AHIMSA	Male	231	1.8294	.60072	.03952
	Female	258	1.7744	.57858	.03602
SEVA	Male	231	1.8896	.58231	.03831
	Female	258	1.7171	.46079	.02869
SAMATVA	Male	231	2.0440	.61727	.04061
	Female	258	2.2610	.68941	.04292
ATMAJ ANAN	Male	231	1.9723	.60743	.03997
	Female	258	1.9798	.57893	.03604
EI	Male	231	2.0390	.59871	.03939

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	Female	258	2.0642	.55234	.03439
VALUE BASED	Male	231	2.0537	.74826	.04923
	Female	258	1.8907	.69101	.04302

Table: 4 Independent sample T test: Gender differences:

Independent Samples Test					
		t-test for Equality of Means			
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
AHIMSA		1.029	476.529	.304	.05502
SEVA		3.605	437.202	.000	.17256
SAMATVA		-3.672	487.000	.000	-.21697
ATMA_JANAN		-.140	475.044	.888	-.00755
EI		-.483	469.894	.629	-.02527
VALUE_BASED		2.493	470.070	.013	.16298

Table 3 gender-wise descriptive statistics indicate meaningful differences across several value dimensions. Seva scored higher among males (M = 1.89) compared to females (M = 1.71), In contrast, Samatva was higher among females (M = 2.26) than males (M = 2.04). Perceptions of a Value-Based Campus Climate were slightly higher among males (M = 2.05) than females (M = 1.89), For the remaining construct Ahimsa, Atma-jnana, and Emotional Intelligence the mean scores for males and females were very similar. Table 4- The t-test revealed significant gender differences in Seva, Samatva, and Value-Based Education, while Ahimsa, Atma-jnana, and Emotional Intelligence remained similar across genders.

Table 5

Descriptives				
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
AHIMSA	Management	120	1.8350	.60456
	Engineering	44	1.7364	.72146
	Commerce	325	1.7963	.56436
	Total	489	1.8004	.58918
SEVA	Management	120	1.7458	.50208
	Engineering	44	1.7500	.57903
	Commerce	325	1.8246	.53030
	Total	489	1.7986	.52827
SAMATVA	Management	120	2.1028	.62143
	Engineering	44	1.9508	.82011
	Commerce	325	2.2072	.65170
	Total	489	2.1585	.66456
ATMA_JANAN	Management	120	1.9917	.61598
	Engineering	44	1.6864	.65613
	Commerce	325	2.0098	.56451
	Total	489	1.9763	.59196
EI	Management	120	1.9714	.52304
	Engineering	44	1.8669	.61030
	Commerce	325	2.1073	.58022
	Total	489	2.0523	.57426
VALUE_BASED	Management	120	1.8933	.70099
	Engineering	44	1.8818	.76349
	Commerce	325	2.0068	.72373
	Total	489	1.9677	.72249

The descriptive statistics reveal meaningful variations across Management, Engineering, and Commerce students in several value and emotional well-being dimensions. Commerce students scored higher on most Indic values Samatva (M=2.20), EI (2.10), Seva (M = 1.82), Value-Based Climate (M = 2.00), followed by Management and engineering students subsequntly. Ahimsa Scores are similar across streams.

Table 10: Academic stream wise Anova

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
AHIMSA	Between Groups	.330	2	.165	.474	.623

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	Within Groups	169.070	486	.348		
	Total	169.400	488			
SEVA	Between Groups	.658	2	.329	1.180	.308
	Within Groups	135.529	486	.279		
	Total	136.187	488			
SAMATVA	Between Groups	3.042	2	1.521	3.479	.032
	Within Groups	212.481	486	.437		
	Total	215.523	488			
ATMA_JANAN	Between Groups	4.093	2	2.046	5.959	.003
	Within Groups	166.912	486	.343		
	Total	171.005	488			
EI	Between Groups	3.279	2	1.639	5.054	.007
	Within Groups	157.649	486	.324		
	Total	160.928	488			
VALUE_BASED	Between Groups	1.484	2	.742	1.424	.242
	Within Groups	253.245	486	.521		
	Total	254.729	488			

Across the three academic streams Management, Engineering, and Commerce the ANOVA results indicate that Ahimsa, Seva, and Value-Based Education did not differ significantly across groups ($p > .05$), showing consistency in these values among students. However, Samatva, Atma-jnana, and Emotional Intelligence showed significant variation across streams ($p < .05$) suggesting that emotional balance, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence differ meaningfully depending on the field of study.

5 DISCUSSIONS:

The present study set out to examine how Indic philosophical values Ahimsa (compassion), Seva (service), Samatva (equanimity), and Atma-jnana (self-awareness) manifest among Gen Z college students and how these values relate to emotional wellbeing and value-based campus climate. The findings collectively suggest that while these values are present at moderate levels, certain demographic and academic factors shape their expression in meaningful ways.

The descriptive statistics indicated that Samatva (Emotional balance) recorded the highest mean among all Indic value dimensions in the present study. This suggests that participating students reported relatively stronger sense of balance, calmness, and emotional stability compared to other values such as Ahimsa, Seva, and Atma-jnana. This result is in contrast to some of the current literature, consistently highlights that Gen Z experiences elevated levels of stress and emotional imbalance, and psychological pressure due to academic competition, social media exposure, and relationship issues.(Singh & Gupta, 2021, Dey, 2024, TOI , 2024)). However, the higher Samatva scores in this study, indicates that participating colleges have recently introduced well-being seminars, mindfulness-based pracices, and modules on Indic values as part of NEP (2020). A study conducted by (Sharma & Gupta, 2021) found that Emotional wellbeing workshops and mindfulness practices improved wellbeing of university students.

The gender differences observed in this study reveal meaningful patterns in how male and female students relate to specific Indic values and emotional wellbeing. Female students reported higher levels of Samatva (emotional balance), which aligns with existing research showing that adolescent and young adult women often exhibit stronger emotional regulation and reflective processing than men (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014; Mishra & Vashist, 2014). Conversely, male students scored higher on Seva and perceptions of a Value-Based Campus Climate, reflecting a tendency among young men to express prosocial behaviour through action-oriented helping and service roles (Carlo et al., 2011). No significant gender differences in Ahimsa, Atma-jnana, and Emotional Intelligence suggests that foundational emotional capacities and non-harmful dispositions are relatively stable across genders during emerging adulthood, a pattern consistent with broader developmental findings (Arnett, 2014). Overall, these results highlight how gendered socialization interacts with cultural values, shaping distinct yet complementary pathways to emotional and mental well-being.

A key objective of the study was to examine whether the students' academic discipline influenced their Indic value scores. The results showed no significant differences in Ahimsa, Seva, and Value-Based Education across streams indicating these values are widely shared across educational backgrounds. This reinforces the argument that core humanistic values are omnipresent in all the disciplines. However, seva ($p < .05$), Atma-jnana ($p < .01$), and Emotional Intelligence ($p < .01$) differed significantly across streams. Commerce students scored the highest across in these dimensions, followed by Management and Engineering. A possible explanation is that disciplines involving frequent peer interaction, teamwork, and practical engagement with people may foster stronger emotional balance and self-awareness. Engineering students, on the other hand, reported lower scores across

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several dimensions, which aligns with findings that technical programs often involve high academic pressure and limited focus on emotional development or value-based learning (Kumar et al., 2021). It is observed that more student are attempting suicides in IIM and IITS (TOI, 2024). It is a matter of concern that KOTA has become a suicide factory due to performance completion and academic stress among NIIT and JEE aspirants (Hindustan times, 2023).

These findings highlight the need for intentional emotional-well-being interventions in technical and professional Institutes, a recommendation consistent with India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020), which emphasizes value-based and holistic education integrating emotional wellbeing and character development.

ANOVA showed no significant differences across age groups or education levels, indicating that students aged 17–24 whether undergraduate or postgraduate reported similar levels of Indic values and emotional well-being. This suggests that these constructs are fairly consistent across demographic groups in the sample.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study offer several meaningful implications for educators, institutions, and mental-health practitioners. The strong endorsement of Samatva (equanimity) after emotional wellness workshops in the participating colleges, It highlights the importance of emotional-wellbeing initiatives undertaken by the institutes. It means the institutes which promotes mindfulness sessions, reflective practices, and Indic-value modules within academic settings, improves wellbeing of the students. Since no significant age or educational-level differences were observed, these programs appear beneficial across student groups and can therefore be implemented universally rather than being tailored only for specific demographics. The results also emphasize the relevance of combining traditional Indic principles with contemporary emotional-intelligence frameworks to promote holistic well-being among Gen Z learners. Institutions may consider embedding value-based education more intentionally into curricula, offering regular workshops, and creating supportive environments that cultivate compassion, self-awareness, and emotional balance. Collectively, the study underscores the importance of a culturally grounded and educationally integrated approach to enhancing well being of the youth. Future research may explore longitudinal effects of such interventions or examine how digital environments shape the practice of these values among emerging adults. Future research can also be conducted to understand students perception about emotional wellbeing pre workshop and post workshop.

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EDUCATION AS A TOOL OF SOFT POWER: INDIA'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP IN CENTRAL ASIA

Shokhan Kenbayev[2] , Margie Parikh[3]

Abstract

This paper explores the strategic role of education as a vital component of India's soft power in promoting responsible citizenship and fostering stronger socio-cultural ties with Central Asia. Since 2014, India has increasingly utilized educational exchange, scholarships, cultural programs, and institutional collaborations as instruments of influence to strengthen mutual understanding and build human capital across the region. By examining India's educational diplomacy, this study highlights how learning becomes both a bridge and a transformative tool in shaping responsible, globally aware citizens who share values of democracy, tolerance, and cooperation. The purpose of the study is to analyze how India's educational initiatives, such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program, and partnerships with Central Asian universities, enhance India's image and soft power appeal. The research employs a qualitative methodology, using content analysis of policy documents, academic publications, and interviews with scholars and students involved in Indo–Central Asian educational programs. It also applies Joseph Nye's theory of soft power as a conceptual framework to interpret how education contributes to India's broader foreign policy objectives in the region. The findings aim to demonstrate that education not only strengthens India's cultural diplomacy but also helps cultivate responsible, well-informed individuals who contribute to sustainable international cooperation.

Keywords: *Soft power, India, Central Asia, educational diplomacy, responsible citizenship, cultural exchange, international relations, foreign policy.*

INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by interdependence and information, global influence is increasingly dependent less on coercion and more on persuasion, attraction, and cooperation. Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, the ability of a country to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction rather than force, has become central to twenty-first-century international relations (Nye, 2004). Among the various tools that states employ to exercise soft power, education stands out for its unique ability to foster human capital, create networks of empathy, and cultivate shared values across borders. India's growing engagement with Central Asia offers a compelling case study of how education operates as a strategic instrument of diplomacy. Since the early 2010s, and especially after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Connect Central Asia" policy initiative, India has sought to reinvigorate its historical, cultural, and economic links with the region (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2012). This policy envisions education as a principal means of building trust, promoting responsible citizenship, and sustaining people-to-people connections. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program, and numerous academic partnerships have emerged as key channels through which India advances its image as a cooperative partner in regional development. This paper analyzes India's educational diplomacy in Central Asia through the lens of soft power. It investigates how educational initiatives contribute to responsible citizenship, defined here as an informed, ethical, and participatory sense of civic responsibility that transcends national boundaries. Using qualitative content analysis, the paper synthesizes official documents, secondary research, and interviews with scholars and students involved in Indo–Central Asian educational programs. It argues that India's educational outreach builds not only technical capacity but also a shared cultural and civic ethos that reinforces India's role as a normative power in Asia.

Theoretical Framework: Joseph Nye's Concept of Soft Power

Joseph Nye (1990, 2004, 2011) introduced soft power as a corrective to traditional notions of "hard power," which rely on coercion or payment to achieve foreign policy goals. Instead, soft power emerges from attraction rooted in culture, political values, and foreign policies perceived as legitimate and moral. For Nye, education embodies all three dimensions: it reflects cultural sophistication, transmits democratic values, and fosters legitimacy through developmental cooperation. Scholars have since expanded Nye's framework to contextualize how education shapes state identity and influence. Chitty and Naidoo (2021) argue that educational diplomacy not only enhances reputation but also embeds long-term cultural norms in recipient societies. Similarly, Mattern (2005) and Zaharna (2010) note that education provides a non-confrontational platform for persuasion and

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dialogue, allowing for subtle forms of norm diffusion. In India's case, education functions as a multi-layered soft power asset. Historically, India's ancient universities, Nalanda and Takshashila, symbolized intellectual exchange across Asia (Thakur & Sinha, 2020). Modern India continues this tradition through initiatives emphasizing inclusivity, pluralism, and democratic values. By exporting these principles through educational programs, India extends its cultural and ideological reach. Nye's framework thus provides a conceptual foundation for analyzing how education cultivates "responsible citizenship" both within and beyond national boundaries.

India's Educational Diplomacy and Strategic Vision

India's foreign policy toward Central Asia has evolved from episodic contact to sustained partnership. The "Connect Central Asia" policy announced in 2012 emphasized four pillars: political dialogue, economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and education (MEA, 2012). Educational diplomacy serves as a unifying thread across these pillars, reinforcing India's commitment to shared development. Several motives underpin this educational outreach. Strategically, Central Asia's geographic position, bordering Afghanistan, China, and Russia, makes it a crucial arena for India's regional influence (Pant & Joshi, 2017). Economically, the region's energy resources complement India's demand for diversification. Yet, beyond material interests, India's approach aims to cultivate goodwill and cultural resonance through education and human resource development. The ICCR scholarships exemplify this vision. Each year, hundreds of Central Asian students pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Indian universities. These programs, supported by the MEA, expose students to India's democratic ethos and pluralistic society. Similarly, the ITEC program, launched in 1964 but significantly expanded since 2014, offers technical training to government officials, engineers, and entrepreneurs from partner nations (MEA, 2020). Courses in governance, digital infrastructure, and public policy promote efficiency and transparency, aligning with India's image as a provider of knowledge-based development. Institutional collaborations further anchor educational diplomacy. Indian universities such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University, and the University of Hyderabad maintain partnerships with counterparts in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Joint research, faculty exchange, and co-convened conferences, often supported by the Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA), encourage sustained intellectual dialogue. These collaborations not only disseminate Indian academic practices but also enable mutual learning, strengthening institutional capacity across the region.

Mechanisms of Engagement: ICCR, ITEC, and Institutional Partnerships

The ICCR operates as India's flagship soft power agency for cultural and educational diplomacy. Since 1950, scholarships have been awarded to thousands of foreign students. In Central Asia, ICCR's role expanded significantly after India established embassies in all five republics. Recent figures suggest that over 1,000 Central Asian students study in India annually under ICCR schemes (ICCR Annual Report, 2023). Many graduates return home to occupy leadership roles in academia, civil service, and business, acting as informal ambassadors for India. The ITEC program complements ICCR by targeting mid-career professionals and government officials. Training modules cover governance reforms, public finance, digital transformation, and renewable energy. As a result, participants not only acquire technical skills but also experience India's institutional culture of democracy and innovation (MEA, 2020). This exposure nurtures a shared vocabulary of responsible governance, an essential element of responsible citizenship. Beyond scholarships and training, India has supported joint educational infrastructure in Central Asia. The India–Central Asia Centre for Excellence in Information Technology, established in Tashkent (2011) and Dushanbe (2018), provides digital literacy and research capacity (National Informatics Centre, 2019). These centers symbolize India's transition from a traditional aid donor to a knowledge partner. Moreover, cultural centers affiliated with ICCR in Almaty and Tashkent offer Hindi language courses, yoga instruction, and arts workshops. Through these, education becomes experiential diplomacy, a way of living and learning that deepens mutual respect. Such initiatives collectively construct a multi-dimensional educational network that projects India's soft power through knowledge and culture.

Education and Responsible Citizenship in Central Asia

Responsible citizenship transcends legal nationality; it implies awareness of global interdependence, ethical participation, and a commitment to public good (Heater, 2017). Educational exchange, when grounded in inclusivity and critical thinking, fosters these attributes. India's engagement with Central Asia has precisely demonstrated such potential. Central Asian students studying in India encounter a society where religious, linguistic, and ethnic diversity coexist within a democratic framework. Exposure to this pluralism encourages tolerance and participatory values. Interviews with alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan reveal that their experiences in India strengthened their civic awareness and motivation to contribute to community development upon returning home (Parikh & Kenbayev, 2025). For instance, former ICCR scholars have initiated NGOs promoting women's education and digital literacy in Bishkek and Almaty. Conversely, Indian students participating in exchange programs with Central Asian universities gain a firsthand understanding of post-Soviet societies, Islamic heritage, and contemporary reform processes. This reciprocal learning process embodies Nye's idea that soft power operates through attraction and voluntary adaptation, not imposition. Educational partnerships also integrate digital collaboration. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India expanded virtual exchanges, offering online training through the SWAYAM platform and e-ITEC initiatives (MEA, 2021). These

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digital channels preserved continuity and demonstrated adaptability, reinforcing India's image as an innovative and resilient partner.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite its promise, India's educational diplomacy in Central Asia faces several obstacles.

First, logistical and linguistic barriers persist. Many Central Asian students struggle with English proficiency, limiting their access to Indian academic resources. Although ICCR provides preparatory language courses, insufficient follow-up support sometimes hampers integration (Thapa, 2020).

Second, competition from other powers, particularly China, Russia, and Turkey, has intensified. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) incorporates education within its "people-to-people connectivity" pillar, offering thousands of scholarships through the Silk Road Program (Callahan, 2016). Russia's historical ties and shared language advantage further attract Central Asian students to its universities. India's challenge lies in differentiating its educational brand through quality, affordability, and cultural empathy.

Third, institutional capacity within Indian higher education remains uneven. Overcrowding, bureaucratic procedures, and limited internationalization reduce efficiency. Without robust coordination between ministries and universities, soft power objectives risk dilution (Mukherjee, 2021).

Fourth, soft power outcomes are inherently difficult to quantify. Attraction and influence manifest subtly over time, often through interpersonal trust rather than measurable metrics. Nonetheless, consistent engagement, alumni tracking, and long-term partnerships can provide qualitative indicators of success.

DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

India's educational diplomacy in Central Asia reveals several broader lessons about soft power in practice.

First, education functions as a reciprocal relationship, not a unidirectional export of values. Sustainable influence arises when both sides perceive tangible benefits. India's programs succeed most when they address local developmental priorities, such as governance, digital transformation, or gender equity, rather than merely promoting India's image.

Second, educational initiatives reinforce normative alignment. By framing education within democratic ideals, India situates itself as a responsible power advocating inclusive development. This differentiates India's soft power model from China's infrastructure-driven approach or Russia's nostalgic cultural revivalism.

Third, public-private partnerships can expand reach and innovation. Collaborations between Indian tech firms and Central Asian educational institutions, particularly in IT and renewable energy, could generate employment and visibility. Such initiatives would translate soft power into shared prosperity, deepening India's credibility as a development partner.

Fourth, alumni networks deserve systematic cultivation. Graduates of ICCR and ITEC programs constitute a living bridge between societies. Establishing regional alumni associations and mentorship schemes can sustain engagement, amplify success stories, and encourage collaborative projects.

Fifth, evaluation mechanisms should accompany educational diplomacy. Regular impact assessments, tracking alumni careers, institutional partnerships, and societal contributions, would help refine policy design and justify resource allocation.

India's educational outreach contributes to what Nye (2011) termed "smart power": the combination of hard and soft elements. While India's trade and strategic interests in Central Asia are evident, education lends moral legitimacy and continuity to its engagement. In nurturing responsible citizens abroad, India simultaneously reinforces its own democratic identity at home.

CONCLUSION

Education, as a form of soft power, operates through persuasion and participation rather than pressure. India's engagement with Central Asia exemplifies how learning can bridge geopolitical divides, create mutual understanding, and foster responsible citizenship. Through programs such as ICCR and ITEC, India has transformed education into a diplomatic asset, one that communicates values of pluralism, democracy, and cooperation. Yet, the journey remains incomplete. To sustain its influence, India must enhance institutional coordination, invest in quality higher education, and adapt to evolving digital landscapes. Strengthening alumni relations, addressing linguistic barriers, and aligning educational programs with local priorities will ensure that India's soft power remains both credible and constructive. However, the broader implications of educational diplomacy extend beyond bilateral relations. Education is not merely a transactional mechanism or a symbolic gesture; it is a transformative process that shapes the cognitive and ethical frameworks through which societies interpret one another. When Indian and Central Asian students learn together, whether in Delhi, Almaty, or Tashkent, they are not only acquiring degrees but also rehearsing modes of coexistence that reject stereotypes and foster empathy. Such exchanges generate "social capital", networks of trust and shared identity that persist long after individual programs conclude. This long-term relational dimension is what makes education one of the most enduring forms of soft power. The interplay between education and responsible citizenship deserves particular emphasis. Citizenship, in this context, transcends legal belonging. It implies a moral orientation toward

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justice, dialogue, and participation. Educational diplomacy, when guided by these principles, helps produce citizens who think beyond borders and act for the common good. India's soft power, therefore, should not be evaluated merely by the number of scholarships granted or memoranda signed, but by the quality of civic consciousness it nurtures among participants. Graduates who embody democratic values, social responsibility, and intercultural competence represent the most authentic ambassadors of India's influence. At the same time, education-based diplomacy must remain vigilant against reproducing asymmetries of power. If educational programs appear paternalistic or self-serving, they risk undermining the very trust they seek to build. To avoid this, India should continually emphasize reciprocity, creating platforms where Central Asian voices shape curricula, research priorities, and cultural narratives. Joint degree programs, co-authored publications, and shared digital learning spaces can help equalize knowledge exchange. The goal should not be to "Indianize" Central Asia intellectually, but to co-create a regional knowledge ecosystem that reflects diversity and mutual respect. Another important frontier lies in technology. The digital revolution is reshaping global education, dissolving physical barriers and creating new spaces of influence. India's investments in platforms such as SWAYAM and e-ITEC already signal recognition of this shift. Expanding these initiatives into hybrid models, combining virtual and in-person components, would dramatically increase accessibility for Central Asian learners, especially in remote areas. By integrating digital infrastructure with local universities, India could position itself as a pioneer of inclusive, technology-driven knowledge diplomacy. Such innovation would not only amplify soft power but also address the developmental needs of partner countries, reinforcing the credibility of India's leadership in South–South cooperation. Furthermore, educational diplomacy must be sustained by domestic reform. India's own higher education system faces challenges of quality assurance, bureaucratic rigidity, and uneven global rankings. To project academic excellence abroad, India must embody it at home. Strengthening university autonomy, fostering international accreditation, and enhancing research funding are not merely domestic priorities; they are prerequisites for global credibility. The more India invests in its intellectual infrastructure, the more persuasive its educational narrative becomes. India's cooperation with Central Asia also intersects with evolving regional geopolitics. As China expands its influence through the Belt and Road Initiative and Russia continues to maintain its historical presence, India's comparative advantage lies in its moral narrative: a pluralistic democracy offering partnership without domination. Educational diplomacy thus becomes both a strategy and a statement, an affirmation that true power resides not in control, but in consent. By nurturing communities of learners who share democratic and humanistic ideals, India can build a constituency for peace and cooperation that endures beyond shifting political winds. Eventually, education's soft power effect is cumulative and subtle. Unlike trade or military alliances, its success is not measured in immediate gains but in generational change. A Central Asian graduate who studied governance in India today may become a policymaker tomorrow, drawing upon lessons of transparency and inclusivity learned during their time abroad. Similarly, Indian students who engage with Central Asian cultures return home with renewed appreciation for diversity and historical continuity. These reciprocal transformations are the quiet revolutions of educational diplomacy, the invisible threads weaving a more interconnected region. Education is more than a means of projecting national image; it is a dialogue that shapes the moral imagination of a shared future. For India and Central Asia alike, that dialogue holds the promise of a region connected not merely by commerce or strategy but by the deeper currents of learning, respect, and responsible citizenship. The success of India's soft power will not be defined solely by the number of programs launched but by the depth of relationships sustained, the empathy cultivated, and the knowledge co-created. In an era when many nations turn inward, India's commitment to education as an outward gesture of friendship and understanding stands as both a pragmatic policy and a moral aspiration. As the next decade unfolds, the durability of India's influence in Central Asia will depend on whether its educational initiatives can adapt to new global realities, digital transformation, climate change, and shifting youth demographics. If India continues to align its soft power strategy with the universal ideals of equality, critical inquiry, and shared human progress, education will remain its most luminous instrument of diplomacy. In that enduring exchange of ideas and ideals lies the true strength of India's partnership with Central Asia: a vision of cooperation grounded not in dominance but in the gentle, persuasive power of knowledge.

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A STUDY ON GEN Z INVESTORS' PREFERENCES ACROSS DIFFERENT INVESTMENT AVENUES IN AHMEDABAD

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Abstract

The growing use of digital financial products and online investment platforms has strongly influenced how Gen Z invests, especially in cities like Ahmedabad. This study examines Gen Z's preferred investment options, motivations for investing, and decision-making processes. A structured questionnaire has been used to collect data from 177 investors, and statistical techniques have been applied for analysis. The findings show that Gen Z is well-informed about investing and primarily prefers market-linked products such as stocks and mutual funds. Although many respondents remain unsure about their own risk tolerance, they are generally satisfied with their investments. The study further finds that investment knowledge and satisfaction are not affected by factors such as gender or education. Overall, the study provides useful insights that can help fintech firms and financial institutions develop better digital tools and investment products that align with the needs and objectives of Gen Z investors in Ahmedabad.

Keywords: Gen Z Investors, Investment Preferences, Investment Avenues

INTRODUCTION:

Investment behaviour in India has been rapidly evolving, especially with the rise of new financial products and digital investment platforms. From traditional options such as fixed deposits, gold, and government schemes to modern avenues like mutual funds, equities, digital gold, and real estate, investors today have a wide variety of choices. The development of fintech applications, online trading platforms, and easy access to market data has transformed how people manage their savings, assess risk, and choose investments. By promoting transparency, financial literacy, and a more data-driven approach to wealth creation, these advancements have reshaped the investment landscape.

Young investors, particularly Gen Z, have emerged as a powerful force in the financial ecosystem in rapidly expanding cities like Ahmedabad. Gen Z investors are tech-savvy, well-informed, and willing to explore new opportunities. They often prefer digital and market-linked options over traditional instruments. However, a variety of factors—including perceived risk, expected returns, liquidity needs, social influence, and trust in financial institutions—have influenced their preferences. While many are attracted to the convenience and growth potential of online investment platforms, some still value the security and stability offered by traditional financial products.

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the preferences of Gen Z investors in Ahmedabad across various investment avenues. Since this generation represents the future of the investment market, understanding their attitudes, motivations, and decision-making styles is essential. Insights from this research aim to assist financial institutions, policymakers, and fintech companies in designing investment products and strategies that align with the expectations, behaviours, and evolving financial goals of young investors.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

(Mital & Parikh, 2024) This is exploring how household investors in Ahmedabad choose and manage their investments, focusing on their savings, spending, preferred investment options, and knowledge of investment choices. It also examines how demographic factors like age, education, income, and family size influence investment decisions. The research uses data collected through a questionnaire to understand what qualities investors look for in investments and their overall perceptions of various options.

(Shah, 2024) In India, women's efforts are crucial for economic growth, and empowering women is key to the country's progress. Women in India are increasingly valuing financial freedom and stability, though many lack investment knowledge compared to men. Women are generally risk-averse and prefer safer investments. A study in Ahmedabad, involving 225 working women, shows that more women, especially younger ones, are now willing to invest in riskier but potentially more rewarding opportunities.

(Parveen, 2024) Generation Z's continued use of the OPR website, focusing on deceptive practices and risk perceptions. It finds that Perceived Usefulness and Enjoyment significantly impact Gen Z consumers' intention to use the platform, aligning with their tech-savvy nature and preference for satisfying and efficient e-commerce

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experiences. While Gen Z demonstrates strong financial management and mindful consumption, they also express heightened concerns about online security, privacy threats, and unauthorized data use. These concerns negatively affect their intention to continue using online platforms, despite their digital literacy. The findings highlight the importance of addressing risk perceptions and enhancing trust to sustain Gen Z's engagement with online platforms.

(Dugar & Madhavan, 2023) Gen Z in India is becoming financially independent and shows unique saving and investing habits based on gender, age, and family income. They rely more on their earnings and are influenced by family members' investment experience. Gen Z prefers long-term investments in assets like equity shares, mutual funds, fixed deposits, and gold/silver, while also exploring risky options like crypto for short-term gains. Their investment decisions are shaped by factors like returns, long-term benefits, and past performance. Many invest in mutual funds, growth stocks, and sectors like banking and IT. Although they often follow herd behaviour and fear initial losses, they use modern investing apps and are eager to learn and improve their skills.

(Bhisikar, 2024) The study challenges the belief that age drives investment behaviour, showing that financial literacy, digital exposure, and economic awareness shape Gen Z's choices more strongly. It highlights the need for targeted financial education, tailored marketing, and improved digital platforms to better engage young investors in Ahmedabad.

(Trivedi, 2023) The younger generations, particularly Generations Z and Y, are recognized for their ecological sensitivity, while individuals over 50 often exhibit higher awareness and preference for environmentally conscious businesses. A growing trend toward eco-friendly products and healthier lifestyles is evident, emphasizing the importance of green marketing. Businesses must adapt to this trend, focusing on sustainable practices and products to mitigate environmental impact. Green marketing research highlights strategies for encouraging consumers to adopt greener choices, even those initially indifferent to environmental concerns. However, prior studies suggest that generational differences may not play a decisive role in segmenting the green marketing audience due to the complexity of green purchasing decisions.

(Chaudhary & Mittal, 2023) Saving and investing can lead to good returns, but it's important to understand where and how much to invest. To make wise choices, one must know the different investment options and their risks. Everyone needs a plan to reach their financial goals, but not all investors, especially those in rural areas with limited resources and education, fully understand these options. This study looks at rural investors' awareness of available investment opportunities and their preferences to provide insights and suggestions.

(Panchal & Ajmera, 2022) it shows that most investors are young (20–30 years old), with many being students, and the majority are male. Online trading is the preferred method. Most investors use fundamental and technical analysis before investing. It was found that awareness of risk reduces investment time, while higher income leads to a higher percentage of income invested. Returns are the main investment objective, and family and friends are the biggest sources of investment advice. All these factors significantly influence investment decisions and the expected rate of return.

(Prajapati, Chauhan, & Rai, 2022) it focuses on understanding people's buying behaviour when choosing different investment options. Investing is essential to achieve future goals, build wealth, and develop financial discipline. It examines factors like age, education, gender, risk appetite, and financial knowledge that influence investment decisions. The study also highlights the wide range of investment options available, such as the stock market, real estate, gold, and bonds, and how individuals aim to select the best one.

NEED OF THE STUDY: The study has focused on the changing investment behaviour of Gen Z in Ahmedabad. They have shown a strong preference for digital platforms, sustainable options, and new financial instruments such as cryptocurrencies and stocks, which has made their investment choices more diverse. By examining their preferences, the study has provided useful insights for banks, financial advisors, and policymakers to develop better investment options and support market growth in this emerging financial hub.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY: The scope of this study has focused on understanding the investment preferences of young investors. It has examined the factors influencing their decisions, including risk tolerance, expected returns, and financial goals. The study has investigated attitudes towards contemporary alternatives such as cryptocurrencies, peer-to-peer lending, and sustainable investing, as well as more conventional options like stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. To identify patterns and variations among different youth segments, it also has considered demographic variables such as age, income, and education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the preference of investors on various investment alternatives.
2. To identify the primary motivation of investors to invest in different investment avenues.

RESEARCH DESIGN: Descriptive research design used to study Gen Z investors' preferences across different investment avenues in Ahmedabad.

DATA COLLECTION SOURCES: The data has been collected through a structured questionnaire, ensuring a systematic approach to gathering primary data.

SAMPLING PLAN: The study's sampling population has consisted of individual investors in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. A sample unit of investors across various age groups in the city has been selected, with a total sample size of 177,

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and data has been collected using the non-probability convenience sampling method. A structured questionnaire has been used for data collection, and the analysis has been carried out using Excel and SPSS.

HYPOTHESES:

$H0_1$: There is no significant association between gender and preferred investment avenue.
$H0_2$: There is no significant association between investors' primary motivation for investing and their preferred investment avenue.
$H0_3$: There is no significant association between investment horizon and challenges faced by investors.
$H0_4$: The mean risk tolerance is the same across all income groups.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Descriptive Analysis:

Demographic Profile			
Particulars	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Gender	Male	125	71%
	Female	52	29%
Age	18-20	32	18.08%
	21-23	113	63.84%
	24-27	32	18.08%
Education Qualification	Primary	6	3.39%
	Secondary and Higher Secondary	16	9.04%
	Graduate	84	47.46%
	Post Graduate	71	40.11%
Employment Status	Student	92	51.98%
	Professional	17	9.60%
	Government Employee	3	1.69%
	Private Employee	37	20.90%
	Self Employed	28	15.83%
Annual Income	Less than 3,00,000	118	66.67%
	Rs.3,00,001-Rs.6,00,000	38	21.48%
	Rs.6,00,001-Rs.9,00,000	11	6.21%
	Rs.9,00,001-Rs.12,00,000	3	1.69%
	Rs.12,00,001-Rs.15,00,000	4	2.26%
	More than 15,00,000	3	1.69%

From the total of 177 respondents, the majority were male (125), while 52 were female, showing a higher male participation. The age group of 21–23 had the highest number of respondents (113), followed by equal numbers of 32 respondents in the 18–20 and 24–27 age groups. In terms of educational qualification, 84 respondents held a Graduate degree, 71 had a Post Graduate degree, 16 had completed Secondary and Higher Secondary education, and 6 had Primary education. Regarding employment status, 92 respondents were Students, 37 were Private Employees, 28 were Self Employed, 17 were Professionals, and 3 were Government Employees. For annual income, 118 respondents earned less than ₹3,00,000, 38 earned between ₹3,00,001 and ₹6,00,000, 11 earned between ₹6,00,001 and ₹9,00,000, 4 earned between ₹12,00,001 and ₹15,00,000, and 3 respondents earned above ₹15,00,000.

$H0_1$: There is no significant association between gender and preferred investment avenue.

Significant association between Gender and Preferred investment avenue		
Parameters	Gender	Total

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		Male	Female	
Preferred Investment Avenue	Stocks	46	11	57
	Mutual Funds	32	15	47
	Fixed Deposits	10	9	19
	Real Estate	9	4	13
	Bonds	2	0	2
	Gold	8	6	14
Total		107	45	152

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.932	5	.160
Likelihood Ratio	8.434	5	.134
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.114	1	.078
N of Valid Cases	152		

The table presents the test statistics for the Chi-Square Test of Independence, which shows that the Sig. (p-value) is 0.160 at the 5% level of significance. Since this value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is rejected. This indicates that there is no significant association between gender and preferred investment avenue.

$H0_2$: There is no significant association between investors' primary motivation for investing and their preferred investment avenue.

Significant association between investors' primary motivation for investing and their preferred investment avenue.

Parameters		Preferred Investment Avenues						Total
		Stocks	Mutual Funds	Fixed Deposits	Real Estate	Bonds	Gold	
Primary Motivation for Investing	Wealth accumulation	28	16	7	5	1	7	64
	Saving for a specific goal	23	22	7	6	0	4	62
	Retirement planning	5	3	1	1	1	2	13
	Risk diversification	1	6	4	1	0	1	13
Total		57	47	19	13	2	14	152

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.518	15	0.348
Likelihood Ratio	15.744	15	0.399
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.793	1	0.373
N of Valid Cases	152		

The table presents the test statistics for the Chi-Square Test of Independence, which shows that the Sig. (p-value) is 0.348 at the 5% level of significance. Since this value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is rejected. This indicates that there is no significant association between investors' primary motivation for investing and their preferred investment avenue.

$H0_3$: There is no significant association between investment horizon and challenges faced by investors.

Significant association between Investment horizon and Challenges faced by investors.

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Parameters		Investment Horizon			Total
		Short-term (less than 1 year)	Medium-term (1-5 years)	Long-term (more than 5 years)	
Challenges Faces in Investing	Lack of knowledge	11	15	15	41
	Limited Funds	14	17	24	55
	Fear of losing money	6	23	7	36
	Time constraints	2	4	3	9
	No Challenges Faced	2	3	6	11
Total		35	62	55	152

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.550	8	0.128
Likelihood Ratio	12.480	8	0.131
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.214	1	0.644
N of Valid Cases	152		

The table presents the test statistics for the Chi-Square Test of Independence, which shows that the Sig. (p-value) is 0.128 at the 5% level of significance. Since this value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is rejected. This means that there is no significant association between investment horizon and the challenges faced by investors.

$H0_4$: The mean risk tolerance is the same across all income groups.

Descriptives								
Risk Tolerance								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Up to 3 Lakh	85	3.0235	1.07986	.11713	2.7906	3.2565	1.00	5.00
3 to 6 Lakh	29	3.4138	.90701	.16843	3.0688	3.7588	1.00	5.00
6 to 9 Lakh	7	2.8571	1.06904	.40406	1.8684	3.8458	1.00	4.00
9 to 12 Lakh	2	4.5000	.70711	.50000	-1.8531	10.8531	4.00	5.00
12 to 15 Lakh	2	3.5000	.70711	.50000	-2.8531	9.8531	3.00	4.00
More than 15 Lakh	3	2.6667	.57735	.33333	1.2324	4.1009	2.00	3.00
Total	128	3.1250	1.04241	.09214	2.9427	3.3073	1.00	5.00

ANOVA					
Mean risk tolerance is the same across all income groups.					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.489	5	1.698	1.599	.165
Within Groups	129.511	122	1.062		
Total	138.000	127			

The table presents the test statistics for the One-Way ANOVA, which shows that the Sig. (p-value) is 0.165 at the 5% level of significance. Since this value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted and the

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alternative hypothesis (H_1) is rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean risk tolerance among investors belonging to different income groups.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study has shown that most Gen Z respondents have been actively investing in various financial products for a variety of reasons, primarily saving for long-term security, wealth accumulation, income generation, and capital appreciation. The most popular investment options have been stocks (37.5%) and mutual funds (30.9%), with fewer respondents having selected fixed deposits, real estate, or gold. An encouraging 94.1% of investors have intended to increase their investments in the upcoming year, and the majority have invested with medium- or long-term horizons. Over half of the respondents have expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction, indicating generally positive satisfaction levels. Hypothesis testing has shown that investors' primary motivation has significantly influenced their preferred investment avenue, meaning people have chosen investments based on their financial goals. However, risk tolerance has not affected investment choice, and investment horizon has not shown any significant link with the challenges faced by investors. The One-Way ANOVA results have also shown that risk tolerance has not differed across income levels, indicating that income has not determined an investor's risk-taking attitude. Overall, the findings have suggested that Gen Z investors in Ahmedabad have been knowledgeable, increasingly active, and driven more by personal financial goals than by demographic differences.

CONCLUSION:

The study on the preferences of Gen Z investors in Ahmedabad across a range of investment avenues has revealed an increase in young investors' awareness, confidence, and engagement. The results have shown that Gen Z has actively participated in investment decisions and has become more knowledgeable about contemporary financial products, primarily due to personal financial objectives rather than demographic considerations. Despite having strong overall investment knowledge and high levels of satisfaction, many have still found it difficult to articulate their risk tolerance, which has had a significant impact on how satisfied they have been with their investment outcomes. The analysis has also shown that while risk tolerance, income level, and investment horizon have not significantly altered behaviour, motivation has had a significant impact on investment decisions. Financial institutions and fintech platforms have needed to concentrate on improving financial literacy, streamlining investment options, and offering user-friendly digital tools in order to support this quickly changing investor segment. According to the study, Gen Z investors have been creating a new, technologically advanced investment environment in Ahmedabad that has emphasized long-term financial goals, accessibility, and informed decision-making.

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BUILDING RESILIENCE IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD: STRESSORS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG GEN Z LEARNERS

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Abstract

Gen Z learners are growing up in an era defined by constant connectivity, rapid information flow, and continuous digital stimulation. While technological advancement enhances access to knowledge and broadens educational possibilities, it simultaneously generates unprecedented cognitive and emotional demands. The resulting phenomenon of this information overload has been linked to increased stress, heightened anxiety, decision paralysis, declining attention spans, and diminishing resilience (Levitin, 2014; Rosen, 2020). This paper adopts a conceptual and analytical approach grounded in a narrative review of scholarly literature and enriched by experiential knowledge to examine the primary stressors experienced by Gen Z learners within the overlapping contexts of digital saturation, academic competition, social media influence, and lifestyle imbalance. The discussion is situated within established psychological frameworks that explore the pathways through which stress is produced, experienced, and controlled. Selye's (1975) General Adaptation Syndrome provides insight into the physiological stages of stress response, while Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping highlights the role of cognitive appraisal in shaping individual experiences of stress. Complementing these models, Masten's (2001) Theory of Resilience underscores the capacity of young individuals to recover, adapt, and thrive despite challenges. Building on these theoretical foundations, the paper synthesizes evidence-based coping strategies shown to mitigate stress in high-pressure digital environments. These strategies include mindfulness-based practices (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), balanced digital routines, cognitive reframing techniques grounded in cognitive-behavioral theory (Beck, 2011) and lifestyle practices that promote holistic well-being such as balanced sleep cycles, regular physical activity, and mindful time management. The paper presents resilience not merely as an inherent trait but a learnable and essential skill for navigating the complexities of contemporary life. It proposes a holistic, lifestyle-conscious approach that individuals can adopt to strengthen well-being, cultivate adaptive coping behaviours, and support sustainable personal and academic growth.

Keywords: *Information overload, stress, resilience, coping strategies, holistic well-being*

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The twenty-first century has ushered in an era of pervasive digital connectivity that has transformed how young people communicate, consume information, and engage with the world. For Generation Z - learners who have grown up with smart phones, social media, and constant digital stimulation - this hyperconnected environment has not only expanded learning opportunities and democratized access to knowledge but also introduced a new set of cognitive and emotional challenges. Research increasingly shows that continuous digital engagement contributes to information overload, diminished attention spans, and heightened levels of stress and anxiety among young learners (Levitin, 2014; Rosen, 2020). These pressures are further intensified within academic environments, where students navigate competitive expectations and multitasking demands along with the constant urge to remain digitally connected and updated, adding to heightened feelings of anxiety and stress triggered by the fear of missing out. Understanding these emerging patterns of stress among Gen Z learners requires more than simply identifying digital pressures; it calls for a deeper look at how stress develops, accumulates, and affects young people. Psychological frameworks help strengthen this process by explaining both, the biological strain created by constant stimulation and the cognitive evaluations that shape individual reactions. Models such as Selye's (1975) General Adaptation Syndrome and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping offer valuable insight into the physiological and cognitive mechanisms that underpin stress responses. Complementing these perspectives, Masten's (2001) work on resilience highlights the possibility of adaptation - even in high-pressure digital environments - when students have supportive systems and effective coping habits. Situated at the intersection of psychology, digital culture, and learner well-being, the paper explores the major stressors affecting Gen Z learners and presents evidence-based coping strategies that enhance resilience and promote holistic health in an age shaped by information overload.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The rise of the digital age has significantly reshaped cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns of contemporary learners. Generation Z, often described as the first fully digital-native cohort, is immersed in an environment marked by rapid information flow, constant notifications, and pervasive online engagement (Rosen, 2020). While digital tools enhance access to educational resources and support innovative learning experiences, scholars argue that the overwhelming volume of information available today often exceeds the brain's natural processing capacity, leading to what Levitin (2014) defines as 'information overload'. Research has consistently linked this overload to heightened stress, reduced productivity, and cognitive fatigue, making it essential to understand how young learners interpret and navigate such demands.

To contextualize these experiences, classical and contemporary stress theories offer valuable insight into the mechanisms through which digital conditions shape student well-being. Selye's (1975) General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) offers a foundational explanation of how the body responds to prolonged stress. GAS outlines three stages - alarm, resistance, and exhaustion - that individuals move through when faced with sustained demands. In digitally saturated contexts, learners are frequently exposed to constant notifications, academic pressures, and the need to multitask across multiple platforms. These conditions often keep them in the resistance stage for extended periods, where they attempt to maintain performance despite heightened mental effort. Without adequate rest or effective coping strategies, this sustained activation progresses into the exhaustion stage, resulting in burnout, reduced concentration, irritability, and emotional depletion.

While GAS explains the biological strain produced by continual digital stimulation, cognitive theories help understand why certain online and academic demands feel overwhelming for some learners but manageable for others. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping shifts the focus from the stressor itself to the individual's interpretation of it. According to this model, stress emerges through two key appraisal processes. In the primary appraisal stage, learners evaluate whether a situation poses a threat, a challenge, or no real significance. For example, an upcoming exam, a delayed message reply, or a rapidly filling inbox may be appraised as threatening by some because these situations signal potential failure, social exclusion, or loss of control while others may interpret these situations as manageable challenges. On the other hand, the secondary appraisal stage involves assessing one's perceived ability to cope, drawing on factors such as time-management skills, emotional regulation, prior experience, and available social support. When students perceive these resources as inadequate, the situation is more likely to be experienced as stressful. This dynamic is especially relevant for Gen Z learners, who frequently juggle academic expectations alongside pressures to remain socially and digitally active, monitor multiple information streams, and respond promptly across media platforms. When the demands of these environments exceed students' perceived coping capacities, their sense of control diminishes, and they feel intensely overwhelmed.

Alongside these stress models, resilience research offers a complementary perspective on how learners adapt to these demands of digital saturation. Masten's (2001) Theory of Resilience conceptualizes resilience not as a rare or extraordinary quality, but as a normative, learnable set of abilities rooted in everyday protective systems. These systems include supportive relationships, emotional regulation skills, cognitive flexibility, positive beliefs, and stable routines. For Gen Z learners, who often operate in environments characterized by rapid digital stimulation, high academic expectations, and constant connectivity, resilience serves as a crucial buffer against the cognitive and emotional strain of information overload. Research demonstrates that resilient individuals are better able to maintain emotional balance, sustain attention, and recover more quickly from stress-induced disruptions. They are also more capable of reappraising stressful situations in constructive ways, which reduces the likelihood of experiencing overload as uncontrollable or overwhelming.

Taken together, the existing literature reveals a dynamic interplay between digital behaviors, cognitive appraisal processes, physiological stress responses, and the adaptive capacities that strengthen resilience. This body of work emphasizes the importance of examining not only the external demands that characterize Gen Z learners' digital and academic environments but also the internal mechanisms through which these demands are regulated. Recognizing this interaction is crucial for understanding why similar digital conditions can produce markedly different stress outcomes across individuals and for identifying the factors that amplify or mitigate psychological strain. This integrated perspective offers a robust conceptual foundation for the present study, guiding the analysis of the specific stressors experienced by Gen Z learners and identifying the coping strategies that are grounded in established theory and supported by empirical evidence.

KEY STRESSORS AMONG GEN Z LEARNERS AND THEIR EFFECTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Digital and Information Related Stressors

Information overload remains one of the most significant stressors affecting Gen Z learners, largely due to the volume, immediacy, and diversity of digital inputs they encounter each day. Academic portals, instant messaging apps, news feeds, and social media streams create a constant flow of information that the brain must sort, evaluate, and respond to. Levitin (2014) argues that the human brain is not designed to process such rapid and competing channels of input, leading to cognitive fatigue, impaired memory consolidation, and reduced ability to filter relevant content from irrelevant content. For students, this manifests as difficulty prioritizing academic

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tasks, feeling mentally cluttered and experiencing decision paralysis when faced with multiple online resources. Through the lens of Selye's (1975) General Adaptation Syndrome, repeated exposure to overwhelming information keeps the body in a state of heightened arousal, triggering the alarm stage repeatedly and preventing physiological recovery. This sustained activation increases the risk of exhaustion, emotional depletion, and academic burnout. The constant overload of information does not merely strain the mind through volume - it also creates conditions that push students toward compensatory behaviors, such as digital multitasking, which further compounds stress. Digital multitasking - such as toggling between learning management systems, social media platforms, streaming videos, and messaging apps - has become a normalized behavior among Gen Z learners. Although students often believe multitasking improves efficiency, empirical studies contradict this assumption. Rosen (2020) demonstrates that frequent task-switching disrupts working memory, lowers task accuracy, and elevates cortisol levels. The Transactional Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) helps explain why multitasking feels particularly stressful: when learners appraise simultaneous demands as exceeding cognitive capacity, they experience anxiety and frustration. In turn, these emotional responses impair performance further, creating a negative feedback loop. Over time, sustained multitasking mirrors the resistance stage of the General Adaptation Syndrome, draining mental resources and contributing to fatigue and loss of academic motivation. The pressure to keep switching between platforms is further intensified by another powerful force - the need for constant connectivity and the fear of missing out - which keeps learners psychologically tethered to their devices. Gen Z learners exist within an 'always-on' culture, where notifications, updates, and direct messages create a sense of obligation to remain continuously available. The Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) intensifies this compulsion, as students worry about missing academic updates, social interactions, or trending information. Eventually, this requirement to stay digitally present - whether real or perceived - produces cognitive tension and emotional unease.

ACADEMIC AND PERFORMANCE RELATED STRESSORS

On the academic front, Gen Z learners navigate academic landscapes marked by high expectations, frequent assessments, and increasing pressure to excel. Digital learning systems, while highly streamlined, make coursework and performance more visible, amplifying comparison with peers and creating pressure to maintain top grades. Heavy workload, shorter assignment cycles, and constant performance tracking raise students' perceived stress levels. Research shows that this competition erodes intrinsic motivation, replacing curiosity-driven learning with anxiety-driven performance. While competition creates the broader climate of academic pressure, the pace and structure of digital education intensify these challenges through constant task demands. Even when students are motivated to perform well, the rhythm of digital coursework - marked by frequent submissions and platform-based tracking - adds to the layer of strain. This shift from static academic cycles to continuous evaluation means that stress is not only about performing well but also about keeping up. As a result, the pressure to excel becomes closely tied to the pressure to manage an ever-expanding list of academic responsibilities, setting the stage for the overwhelming experience of deadline saturation. Students describe this 'deadline saturation' as a cycle of constant catch-up, leaving little space for rest or reflection. Appraisal processes play a key role here: when students perceive deadlines as uncontrollable or excessive, they experience heightened stress and reduced self-efficacy. Repeated cycles of time pressure accelerate progression toward exhaustion in the General Adaptation Syndrome framework, contributing to burnout, cynicism, and reduced productivity. Building on this strain of relentless deadlines, opportunities for deep, sustained cognitive engagement eventually reduce. The digital environment - marked by constant interruptions such as notifications, pop-ups, and chat windows - disrupts learners' attempts to immerse themselves in complex academic tasks, resulting in shallow engagement, reduced comprehension, and diminished academic confidence. This lack of deep work contributes to frustration and anxiety, which the Transactional Model frames as responses to perceived inadequacy. Students interpret their inability to focus as a personal failure, intensifying emotional strain and diminishing academic resilience.

SOCIAL MEDIA DRIVEN STRESSORS

Social media further exposes learners not only to idealized portrayals of peers' academic successes but also physical appearances, and social lives. Because these images are curated, they often create unrealistic standards. Many Gen Z learners compare their achievements and identities to these constructed narratives, producing feelings of inadequacy, lowered self-esteem, and heightened anxiety. This phenomenon aligns with cognitive appraisal theory, which posits that students interpret social media cues as threats to self-worth, activating emotional responses that may include shame, envy, or discouragement. As comparison-driven stress grows, students feel the need to carefully manage and present their digital identities. Social media platforms encourage the creation of a polished digital identity. For many students, the pressure to maintain a 'perfect' online appearance - through posts, stories, comments, and interactions creates emotional strain. Validation through likes and follows becomes intertwined with self-esteem. This constant self-monitoring produces stress, self-consciousness, and vulnerability to negative feedback. The Transactional Model suggests that students often appraise this pressure as exceeding their emotional coping resources, intensifying psychological strain. Beyond the internal pressure of maintaining an ideal online persona, many learners also encounter external threats

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within digital spaces, most notably in the form of cyber bullying and online hostility. Online hostility, including subtle exclusion, negative comments, or direct harassment, poses a significant psychological threat. Such experiences undermine emotional safety, introducing fear, shame, and social isolation. According to resilience theory (Masten, 2001), supportive relationships form the foundation of adaptive functioning. However, cyber-bullying compromises this foundation, weakening resilience and undermining emotional well-being.

Lifestyle and Behavioral Stressors

Late-night screen exposure, binge-watching, and irregular routines disrupt sleep cycles, reducing both sleep quality and emotional regulation. Sleep deprivation elevates cortisol levels, weakens attention, and increases vulnerability to stress (Rosen, 2020). Within the GAS framework, inadequate rest limits the body's ability to recover from stress, hastening progression toward exhaustion. As disrupted sleep weakens students' ability to regulate stress, another lifestyle factor further intensifies this vulnerability: the increasingly sedentary nature of digitally driven routines. Digital dependence reduces physical activity, contributing to lethargy, fatigue, and decreased mental clarity. Sedentary lifestyles weaken resilience by undermining physical health, which is closely linked to stress regulation. Students with limited physical activity demonstrate lower emotional stability and greater susceptibility to academic stress. These physical effects are compounded by behavioral challenges, particularly the difficulty many students face in managing their time amid constant digital distractions. The abundance of digital distractions makes task prioritization challenging leading to ineffective time management which further leads to procrastination, feelings of guilt, and cycles of stress that reinforce one another.

Emotional and Psychological Stressors

Beyond lifestyle patterns, the emotional and psychological impact of digital immersion further shapes how Gen Z learners experience stress, revealing deeper internal struggles that often remain unseen. Constant sensory and informational input generates a baseline of overstimulation that contributes to irritability, heightened anxiety, and difficulty concentrating. Sustained overstimulation aligns with the resistance stage of GAS, with prolonged exposure eventually triggering exhaustion. As anxiety and overstimulation erode students' emotional balance, another paradox of the digital age that becomes evident is the experience of loneliness amidst constant online connection. Many Gen Z learners report loneliness, emotional numbness, and lack of meaningful support. According to Masten (2001), strong relational networks are essential for resilience. When learners lack authentic connections - even within hyper connected environments - their stress vulnerability increases. This emotional vulnerability is complicated even more by the identity-related pressures students navigate in digital spaces, where the need to define and present oneself creates additional layers of psychological strain. Digital spaces expose young people to a wide range of identities, values, and lifestyle choices. While this can be empowering, it may also create confusion, pressure to conform, or pressure to perform. The need to negotiate identity in public digital spaces creates tension, self-doubt, and emotional fatigue.

Socio-Environmental Stressors

As these personal and psychological pressures unfold, they are shaped by broader social and environmental expectations that influence how Gen Z learners interpret and respond to stress. In many cultural contexts, strong familial expectations around academic excellence and future success intensify pressure. Students may internalize these expectations as personal obligations, leading to heightened stress when performance fluctuates. Appraisal processes shape these responses: tasks perceived as linked to family approval or disappointment trigger deeper emotional responses. While family and cultural expectations exert direct interpersonal pressure, a different layer of strain arises from the wider uncertainties students face in the world around them, particularly those linked to economic and global instability. Concerns about job markets, financial stability, climate crises, and global disruptions such as pandemics and AI-driven automation contribute to chronic background stress. These broader uncertainties interact with daily stressors, creating a layered stress profile that affects emotional stability and long-term well-being.

Coping Strategies for Gen Z Learners

Given the breadth of digital, academic, social, emotional, and socio-environmental challenges faced by Gen Z learners, it becomes essential to explore the strategies that enable them to cope with and adapt to these pressures. The above findings indicate that stress is not solely determined by external demands, but also by cognitive appraisals, emotional responses, and protective systems that mediate individual reactions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Masten, 2001). Consequently, examining coping strategies becomes essential for identifying the mechanisms through which learners can manage information overload, regulate emotional strain, and sustain academic engagement. Drawing on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model - which emphasizes the role of cognitive appraisal in determining stress - and Masten's (2001) resilience theory - which highlights everyday adaptive systems as key protective factors - effective coping involves a combination of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, lifestyle-based, and institutional approaches. These strategies not only reduce immediate stress responses but also strengthen long-term resilience, enabling learners to function more effectively in environments characterized by information overload and constant digital stimulation.

Mindfulness-Based Coping Strategies

Mindfulness has emerged as a highly effective strategy for addressing the cognitive fragmentation and emotional reactivity associated with digital overload. In a fast-paced environment marked by constant notifications and rapid information flow, mindfulness practices - such as breath awareness, grounding exercises, and meditation

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enable learners to anchor their attention in the present moment, thereby reducing impulsive digital engagement and restoring clarity. Kabat-Zinn (2003) argues that mindfulness strengthens attention networks, improves emotional balance, and calms physiological arousal, making it particularly relevant for students whose attention is repeatedly disrupted by digital devices. Beyond traditional mindfulness, digital mindfulness encourages learners to cultivate intentional awareness of their technology use. By recognizing digital triggers, approaching app use with clear intent, and evaluating their screen-time patterns, students cultivate greater self-regulation and agency in their digital lives.

Cognitive-Behavioral Coping Strategies

Cognitive-behavioral strategies focus on restructuring the internal thought processes that shape stress responses. Gen Z learners frequently experience stress not only because of external demands but also due to internal interpretations - such as catastrophizing workload, assuming inadequacy, or misreading social cues online. Beck's (2011) cognitive reframing approach helps students identify these distorted thoughts and replace them with more accurate, constructive perspectives. This reduces the intensity of academic pressure, diminishes digital comparison anxiety, and promotes self-efficacy. Structured problem-solving is another key component wherein breaking assignments into smaller steps, creating clear task sequences, and planning action stages reduces cognitive overload and increases perceived control, a central determinant of stress appraisal in Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model. Additionally, thought - emotion journaling allows students to externalize internal concerns, trace emotional patterns, and gain insight into how digital habits affect their mental state. Through reflection, learners can identify maladaptive cycles - such as procrastination, emotional avoidance, or perfectionistic spirals - and replace them with healthier cognitive patterns.

Behavioral strategies also address the outward routines and habits that contribute to stress. Time management is especially vital for Gen Z learners, who often juggle overlapping deadlines, digital distractions, and academic expectations. Tools such as task batching, daily planning, and the Pomodoro technique helps establish rhythm, reduce multitasking, and promote deeper engagement with academic content. Digital hygiene practices form an essential element of behavioral coping. By disabling unnecessary notifications, using 'Do Not Disturb' modes, and creating device-free zones during study hours, learners reduce the interruptions that impair working memory and elevate stress (Rosen, 2020). These behavioral adjustments improve focus, reduce cognitive switching costs, and enhance comprehension. Behavioral coping therefore targets the environmental and habitual dimensions of stress, offering practical mechanisms to redesign daily routines in ways that support academic and emotional well-being.

Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies

Emotion-focused coping strategies are essential for managing the physiological and psychological responses that arise from stress. Techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, sensory grounding, and visualization help counteract the heightened physiological arousal described in Selye's (1975) General Adaptation Syndrome. Social support is another critical emotional resource. Masten (2001) emphasizes that resilience is deeply rooted in supportive relationships, and research consistently shows that strong peer networks, mentoring relationships, and emotional companionship reduce stress, buffer negative emotions, and enhance coping capacity. Healthy self-expression through journaling, art, music, storytelling, or movement further enables learners to process emotional experiences rather than suppress them. By engaging in emotionally expressive activities, students externalize internal pressures, reduce rumination, and strengthen psychological insight, contributing to overall emotional resilience.

Lifestyle-Based Coping Strategies

Lifestyle choices play a major role in shaping how learners experience and manage stress. Sleep hygiene is foundational; irregular sleep patterns, late-night device use, and overstimulation weaken emotional regulation and impair cognitive functioning. Maintaining consistent sleep routines, limiting screen exposure before bedtime, and creating restful nighttime environments significantly improves stress tolerance and mental clarity (Rosen, 2020). Physical activity serves as another essential buffer against stress, lowering cortisol levels, improving mood, and counteracting the negative effects of sedentary digital behaviors. Regular exercise enhances neuroplasticity, supporting better learning and emotional regulation. Balanced digital routines which integrate study time, offline leisure, reflective practices, and intentional rest help distribute cognitive load more evenly across the day. Lifestyle-based strategies thus provide the physiological and environmental foundation required for sustained coping.

Resilience-Building Strategies

Resilience-building strategies strengthen the underlying capacities that enable learners to adapt positively to stress. Masten's (2001) concept of "ordinary magic" highlights that resilience is not an exceptional trait but a product of everyday systems such as emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, stable routines, and supportive relationships. Strengthening these systems enhances students' long-term ability to recover from setbacks, adjust to changing demands, and maintain well-being despite challenges. Encouraging learners to reflect on meaning and purpose - such as personal values, long-term goals, or sources of motivation helps anchor their academic and digital experiences within a broader sense of identity and direction. This reduces susceptibility to external pressures and enhances perseverance. Building adaptability further supports resilience. When students learn to

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revise plans, shift strategies, and respond flexibly to unexpected obstacles, they reduce the stress associated with uncertainty and develop greater confidence in navigating academic and digital environments.

INSTITUTIONAL AND PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORTS

Institutional and pedagogical supports form the structural foundation that enables individual coping strategies to flourish in educational spaces. Educators play a critical role in designing learning environments that minimize cognitive overload and foster psychological safety. Clear assignment schedules, logical sequencing of tasks, transparent expectations, and manageable workloads reduce external stressors and allow students to engage more effectively. Integrating digital detox intervals, reflective activities, and collaborative learning strengthens students' capacity for focus and emotional connection. At the institutional level, mental health education including workshops on stress management, digital wellness, and emotional regulation equips learners with practical tools that complement individual coping strategies. Academic flexibility, access to counseling services, hybrid learning options, and responsive support systems ensure that diverse learners have the resources needed to navigate personal and academic stress.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that Gen Z learners navigate a uniquely demanding landscape in which digital saturation, academic intensity, social media pressures, and lifestyle disruptions converge to shape their daily stress experiences. Rather than functioning as separate challenges, these stressors interact continuously. This constant connectivity blurs boundaries between work and rest, academic expectations are heightened by constant performance tracking and comparison on digital platforms, and social media amplifies self-doubt through curated standards of achievement and identity. These pressures are further intensified by lifestyle patterns such as irregular sleep, reduced physical activity, and fragmented attention - all of which weaken students' ability to cope effectively. Emotional strain, including anxiety, overstimulation, and loneliness amid hyperconnection, points to a deeper contradiction in Gen Z's digital reality: they are more connected than ever, yet often feel less supported and less in control.

A key insight emerging from the analysis is that Gen Z stress cannot be understood as an individual shortcoming or a temporary reaction to academic challenges. Instead, it reflects a broader systemic environment shaped by technological acceleration, competitive educational structures, and cultural expectations surrounding performance and display of achievement. This means that the pressures affecting students today extend beyond personal habits or isolated moments of overload; they are embedded within the digital and institutional ecosystems through which learning, communication, and identity formation take place. Recognizing this complexity shifts the responsibility from students alone to a shared understanding that educators, institutions society, and digital cultures play in shaping well-being.

These findings emphasize the need for holistic, multi-level strategies that acknowledge both the structural nature of modern stressors and the personal experiences through which students interpret them. Individual coping strategies are essential, but they cannot succeed in isolation. They must be supported by pedagogical practices that promote manageable workloads, psychological safety, and flexibility, as well as institutional commitments to mental health education and student support systems. Strengthening resilience in the digital age requires creating environments that reduce unnecessary strain and equip learners with the tools to navigate complexity with confidence.

Overall, this study reveals that supporting Gen Z learners is not about mitigating a single source of stress but about understanding the interconnected forces shaping their lives. Addressing these multifaceted pressures can foster a generation of learners who achieve academic success while sustaining emotional balance and long-term well-being in an increasingly demanding digital world.

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VALUES, ETHICS, AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

Generation Z, born approximately between 1997 and 2012, represents a unique demographic shaped by rapid technological advancement, global sociopolitical issues, and widespread digital communication. This research paper examines the core values, ethical orientations, and civic responsibilities embraced by Generation Z. Drawing from youth studies, digital culture research, global surveys, and sociological literature, the paper explores how Gen Z develops its worldview, navigates ethical dilemmas, and engages in civic responsibilities—both online and offline. Findings indicate that Gen Z is socially aware, inclusive, environmentally conscious, and digitally empowered. However, challenges such as misinformation, mental health struggles, and distrust in traditional institutions influence their ethical and civic behaviors. Understanding these dynamics is essential for educators, policymakers, and institutions working with this generation.

Keywords: *Generation Z, values, ethics, civic responsibility, digital natives*

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z occupies a unique position in contemporary society as the first cohort to grow up entirely within a digitally connected world. Born between 1997 and 2012, this generation has been shaped by technological advancements, global crises, shifting cultural norms, and diverse social movements. As a result, their values and ethics differ significantly from previous generations. This paper explores the core values, ethical behaviours, and civic responsibilities of Generation Z, drawing from research studies and global youth surveys. Characteristics of Generation Z

Generation Z is often described as tech-savvy, globally conscious, and socially aware. Their upbringing in a digital environment has created new forms of communication and identity expression. Additionally, exposure to global issues—such as climate change, political polarization, and social justice movements—has significantly influenced their world Views

VALUES OF GENERATION Z

Commitment to Social Justice

Gen Z demonstrates strong support for fairness, equality, and human rights. Social justice movements related to gender, race, LGBTQ+ rights, and disability inclusion resonate deeply with their values.

Individual Expression

Personal identity and authenticity form core elements of Gen Z's value system. They believe in expressing themselves freely and rejecting imposed stereotypes.

Environmental Awareness

Climate change is a defining issue for this generation. Gen Z values sustainable living, eco-friendly products, and environmental policies.

Mental Health and Well-Being

Unlike older generations, Gen Z openly discusses mental health challenges and advocates for psychological support systems within schools, workplaces, and communities.

Diversity and Inclusion

Growing up in multicultural environments, Gen Z embraces diversity and expects institutions to support inclusive practices.

Ethical Perspectives of Generation Z

Digital Ethics

As digital natives, their ethical considerations include privacy, data security, cyberbullying, and misinformation. They strive to balance online freedom with responsibility.

Ethical Consumerism

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Gen Z often chooses brands based on ethics—preferring companies with transparent, sustainable, and socially responsible practices.

Workplace Ethics
In professional environments, they expect fair treatment, anti-discrimination policies, transparency, and strong moral leadership.

Critical Thinking and Information Ethics
Faced with information overload, Gen Z prioritizes fact-checking, media literacy, and critical thinking to navigate online content.

Civic Responsibility of Generation Z
Political Engagement
Gen Z participates actively in political issues through voting, online activism, and public demonstrations. They advocate for transparency and governmental accountability.

Community Participation
Volunteering, charity engagement, and community work reflect Gen Z's civic mindset. They engage in both in-person activities and digital community actions.

Digital Citizenship
Their civic responsibility extends to ethical online behaviour, combating misinformation, and advocating for digital rights.

Environmental Responsibility
Generation Z supports environmental activism, sustainable policies, and climate justice initiatives as part of their civic engagement.

Global Citizenship
Gen Z's global consciousness allows them to empathize with international issues and collaborate across cultural boundaries.

Challenges Faced by Generation Z
Misinformation and Digital Overload
The constant stream of online content creates challenges related to truth verification and ethical judgment.

Mental Health Concerns
Academic pressure, social media comparison, and economic uncertainties contribute to rising mental health challenges.

Distrust in Institutions
Gen Z often questions traditional institutions such as governments, media, and corporations, demanding transparency and accountability.

Generation Z's values and ethics reflect both the strengths and challenges of modern society. While they demonstrate high levels of social awareness and innovation, their reliance on digital spaces introduces risks such as misinformation and mental fatigue. Nevertheless, their strong sense of justice and civic responsibility positions them as transformative agents of social change.

CONCLUSION

Generation Z is redefining ethical and civic norms through digital participation, inclusivity, and global awareness. Their values reflect a commitment to justice, environmental sustainability, mental well-being, and ethical consciousness. Despite facing challenges, Gen Z possesses the potential to drive positive societal transformation. Understanding and supporting this generation is essential for shaping a sustainable and equitable future.

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IMMERSIVE LEARNING FOR GEN Z: PROMOTING INCLUSION AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH VIRTUAL, AUGMENTED, AND MIXED REALITY

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Abstract

Background: *The rise of immersive technologies: Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR), has redefined the learning landscape for Generation Z. These learners, shaped by digital connectivity and experiential media, benefit from interactive, multimodal environments that foster engagement and collaboration. Beyond innovation, such technologies hold promise for inclusive education by supporting neurodiverse learners, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and learning disabilities.*

Objectives: *This paper systematically reviews global evidence (2015–2025) on how immersive learning environments enhance communication, engagement, and inclusion among neurotypical and neurodiverse learners. It further explores the pedagogical, ethical, and policy-level implications for achieving equity in digital learning.*

Methodology: *Following the PRISMA 2020 framework, a systematic review was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, IEEE Xplore, and ACM Digital Library. Empirical studies involving VR/AR/MR applications for educational or social-communication outcomes were screened. Data were analyzed thematically under four dimensions: engagement and motivation, accessibility and scalability, transferability of learning, and ethical considerations.*

Outcomes: *Fifty-five studies met the inclusion criteria. Results showed significant gains in engagement, motivation, and communication for neurodiverse learners, alongside empathy and collaboration gains for peers. Mobile AR offered a scalable approach aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Ethical analysis emphasized equity, privacy, and sensory safety. Overall, immersive technologies emerged as* ***catalysts for inclusive learning****, enhancing empathy, participation, and communication across diverse learner profiles.*

Keywords: *Immersive learning, Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), Mixed Reality (MR), Generation Z, inclusion; autism, learning disabilities, Universal Design for Learning, PRISMA 2020*

INTRODUCTION

Immersive Learning, Gen Z, Inclusion, and Digital Transformation

Generation Z, born roughly between 1997 and 2012, represents the first cohort to mature in a hyper-connected, media-rich world. These digital natives learn through constant interaction with multimodal information streams, expecting immediacy, personalisation, and collaboration in their knowledge acquisition. As Chardonnens et al. (2025) observe, their learning ethos is grounded in participatory culture, gamified environments, and social connectedness, all of which redefine the classroom as an interactive ecosystem rather than a static site of instruction.

Simultaneously, educators and policymakers are compelled to ensure that such technological progress supports *inclusion* rather than deepens inequity. Neurodiverse learners—particularly children on the autism spectrum—often experience barriers to communication, social engagement, and sensory regulation within conventional learning settings. Immersive technologies such as **Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR)** present unique affordances to address these barriers by creating structured, adaptive, and repeatable learning spaces that foster communication and empathy (Cai et al., 2022).

VR and AR systems situate learners within interactive three-dimensional environments that simulate authentic social or academic contexts. For neurotypical Gen Z students, these media enhance motivation and experiential understanding; for neurodiverse learners, they provide predictable, controllable environments to practice social cues, eye contact, and turn-taking (Mesa-Gresa et al., 2018). Thus, immersive learning becomes a unifying pedagogy that can accommodate diverse cognitive styles and sensory preferences while engaging the digital sensibilities of contemporary youth.

Recent systematic reviews demonstrate that immersive interventions yield moderate to large effects in improving emotion recognition, joint attention, and conversational reciprocity among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Ke et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023). However, challenges persist in scaling such

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innovations across educational systems, particularly in low- and middle-income contexts where infrastructure and professional capacity remain limited.

This paper therefore reframes the evidence from autism-specific interventions to examine how immersive technologies can inform *inclusive pedagogy* for Gen Z learners broadly. By integrating insights from assistive technology, inclusive education, and digital learning research, it explores how immersive tools can act as **bridges**—linking neurodiverse and neurotypical learners through shared, empathetic, and communicative learning experiences that reflect the realities of twenty-first-century education.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Immersive Technologies

Inclusive education today operates at the intersection of technology, psychology, and pedagogy. The growing body of research on **immersive technologies,** Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR), illustrates how digital environments can support learners with diverse cognitive, sensory, and communicative profiles. Rooted in constructivist and socio-cognitive learning theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Kolb, 1984), immersive media allow students to '*learn by doing',* transforming abstract concepts and social interactions into embodied experiences.

2.2. Neurodiversity,

For **neurodiverse learners**, especially those with **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** and **specific learning disabilities** such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, or attention-deficit disorders, immersive technologies offer structured, predictable, and multi-sensory contexts that align with their preferred learning modalities. Learners on the autism spectrum often face challenges in social communication, sensory regulation, and perspective-taking; VR and AR environments allow these skills to be rehearsed in controlled yet realistic simulations (Ip et al., 2018). For instance, virtual classrooms and social-skills games provide opportunities to practice eye contact, emotion recognition, and conversational turn-taking without the anxiety triggered by unpredictable social cues (Chen et al., 2023; Ke et al., 2021).

2.3. Learning Disabilities

Students with **learning disabilities (LDs)** benefit similarly from immersive, experiential formats. AR applications that visualize text or spatial relationships can enhance reading comprehension and numeracy (Chu et al., 2019). By integrating auditory, visual, and kinesthetic stimuli, immersive learning supports multi-channel processing, thereby reducing cognitive load and reinforcing memory retention (Parong & Mayer, 2018). The real-time feedback embedded in VR/AR systems also fosters a growth-mindset orientation, encouraging self-regulation and persistence among students who may otherwise experience repeated failure in conventional settings (Shadiev & Yang, 2020).

At the theoretical level, immersive learning resonates with **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**, which advocates multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (CAST, 2018). Immersive technologies can operationalize these principles by adapting content to diverse learner needs, adjusting sensory intensity for autistic learners, scaffolding text for dyslexic students, or gamifying problem-solving for those with attention difficulties. Importantly, such designs are not remedial add-ons but inclusive innovations that benefit *all* learners, exemplifying the UDL tenet that accessibility enhances quality for everyone.

Taken together, the literature positions immersive technologies as **bridges between cognitive diversity and educational inclusion**. When grounded in sound pedagogy and ethical implementation, VR, AR, and MR can transform classrooms into equitable, engaging ecosystems where neurotypical and neurodiverse learners alike develop communication, empathy, and collaboration skills essential for thriving in a digitally mediated world. Beyond constructivism and experiential learning, immersive education also aligns closely with **Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977)** and **Siemens' Connectivism (2005)**. Bandura's model emphasizes observational learning and imitation within social contexts—principles mirrored in virtual role-play and collaborative VR scenarios, where learners model and internalize behaviors through interactive feedback. Similarly, connectivism positions learning as a process of building and navigating networks of information, tools, and people. Immersive platforms operationalize this by connecting learners across virtual spaces, enabling real-time collaboration and co-construction of meaning. Together, these frameworks reinforce that immersive learning is not merely technological innovation but an **extension of social cognition and networked knowledge construction**, making it particularly effective for diverse learners who benefit from multimodal social engagement.

3. METHODOLOGY

Systematic Review Using PRISMA Framework

This paper draws upon a systematic review conducted following the **Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020)** guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The review aimed to synthesize empirical evidence on **immersive technology interventions**, Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR), that enhance social-communication, engagement, and learning outcomes among **neurodiverse and differently-abled learners**, including individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), dyslexia, attention-deficit disorders, and other specific learning disabilities.

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A comprehensive literature search was carried out across six databases: **Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, IEEE Xplore, and ACM Digital Library,** covering studies published between **2015 and 2025**. Search strings combined keywords related to *immersive technologies*, *education*, *social communication*, *autism*, and *learning disabilities*. The inclusion criteria focused on empirical studies employing VR/AR/MR for learning or communication outcomes in school-age children and adolescents (3 to 21 years). Studies involving neurotypical participants were retained when they provided comparative insights relevant to inclusive or assistive learning design.

Eligible study designs included **randomised controlled trials (RCTs)**, **quasi-experimental**, **single-case**, and **usability** studies. Editorials, conceptual papers, and abstracts without full manuscripts were excluded. The screening, eligibility, and inclusion processes were independently verified by two reviewers, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion to ensure rigor and transparency.

Data extracted from the selected studies encompassed research geography, participant characteristics, sample size, modality (VR/AR/MR), learning or communication domain, and key quantitative or qualitative outcomes. The PRISMA flow diagram (see Figure 1) illustrates the stepwise process of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion.

To ensure methodological reliability, studies were appraised for design quality, clarity of intervention, and replicability. Quantitative data were summarized descriptively, while qualitative and mixed-methods studies were synthesized thematically. This integrative approach allowed comparison across domains—autism, learning disabilities, and inclusive education—thus broadening the interpretive scope from therapeutic outcomes to *pedagogical transformation*.

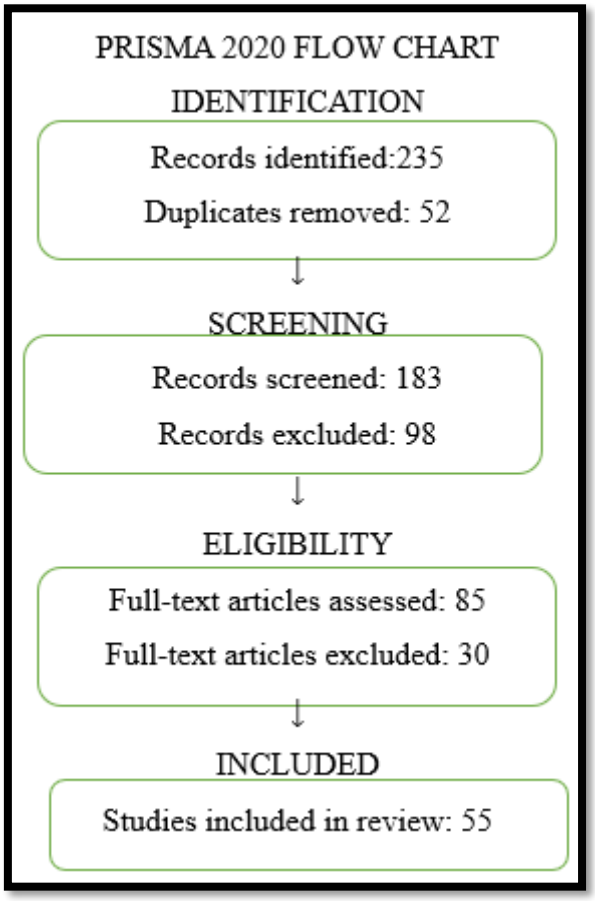

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

Note. Adapted from Page et al. (2021), "The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews," BMJ, 372, n71, under CC BY 4.0 license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).)

*The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram summarizes the study selection process for this systematic review. A total of **235 records** were initially identified through database searches across Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, IEEE Xplore, and ACM Digital Library. After the removal of **52 duplicate records**, **183 studies** remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, **98 articles** were excluded based on irrelevance to immersive learning or non-empirical design. **Eighty-five full-text articles** were assessed for eligibility, and **30** were excluded for not meeting inclusion criteria such as age range, study design, or outcome relevance. Ultimately, **55 studies** met all criteria and were included in the final synthesis.*

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4. FINDINGS AND THEMATIC SYNTHESIS

Engagement, Accessibility, Transferability, and Ethics

The synthesis of 55 studies revealed converging evidence that immersive technologies—spanning Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR)—enhance learning, social-communication, and inclusion across neurodiverse populations. Four dominant and interrelated themes emerged from the reviewed literature: **engagement and motivation**, **accessibility and scalability**, **transferability to real-world contexts**, and **ethical and safety considerations**. These themes illuminate how immersive environments can facilitate inclusive learning for both neurotypical and differently-abled learners.

4.1 Engagement and Motivation

Across studies, immersive technologies consistently demonstrated the capacity to heighten learner engagement, sustain attention, and increase intrinsic motivation. VR and AR interventions were reported to stimulate curiosity and enjoyment, transforming passive learners into active participants (Lorenzo et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and learning disabilities, who often struggle with conventional, text-heavy instruction.

Gamified and sensory-rich immersive environments were found to increase task persistence and emotional involvement (Howard et al., 2022). In VR-based programs targeting social-communication, learners with ASD exhibited improved responsiveness and reduced withdrawal behaviors (Ip et al., 2018), while AR-assisted reading programs enhanced comprehension and memory recall among children with dyslexia (Chu et al., 2019). These results reaffirm that **motivation is a catalyst for learning equity**, and immersive tools can personalize engagement by adapting pacing, sensory intensity, and feedback to each learner's needs.

4.2 Accessibility and Scalability

While evidence highlights strong feasibility in high-resource educational settings, accessibility remains uneven across regions and school systems. Cost of hardware, limited internet infrastructure, and lack of professional training often constrain adoption, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Cai et al., 2022). However, emerging research points to **mobile-based AR** as a cost-effective, scalable solution for inclusive classrooms (Lee & Kim, 2020).

Beyond affordability, accessibility also refers to **design inclusivity**. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) advocate for multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (CAST, 2018). VR/AR systems can operationalize these principles—providing visual scaffolds for learners with dyslexia, interactive cues for those with attention difficulties, and simplified sensory environments for autistic students. When accessibility is approached as a design philosophy rather than an afterthought, immersive technologies evolve into true inclusion enablers rather than elite pedagogical tools.

4.3 Transferability to Real-World Contexts

A major question in immersive education research concerns the **extent to which digital learning translates into authentic skill application**. Studies indicate that immersive simulations facilitate transfer when they mimic realistic contexts and provide graduated exposure (Parong & Mayer, 2018). For learners with Autism or social-communication difficulties, VR role-play modules supported generalization of learned behaviors—such as emotional labeling or collaborative dialogue—to real classroom interactions (Chen et al., 2023). Similarly, AR-based numeracy games allowed students with dyscalculia to apply spatial reasoning strategies to physical manipulatives (Moro et al., 2021).

These findings underscore that **transferability depends on instructional design fidelity,** that is, how well immersive activities integrate with classroom practice and post-digital reflection. When teachers or facilitators provide debriefing sessions, learners are better able to connect virtual experiences to everyday problem-solving, thereby reinforcing conceptual and social learning.

4.4 Ethical and Safety Considerations

The ethical dimension of immersive learning extends beyond data privacy to encompass physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. Several studies raised concerns about visual strain, cybersickness, or overstimulation among children with sensory sensitivities (Howard et al., 2022). For learners with attention or behavioural disorders, the novelty of immersive media can sometimes trigger distraction rather than focus. Hence, **moderation, informed consent, and professional guidance** are essential for responsible use.

Ethical inclusion also involves **equity of access,** ensuring that technological advancements do not widen digital divides between privileged and under-resourced learners. As Hansen et al. (2023) argue, immersive education must be guided by human-centred ethics, prioritising empathy, inclusivity, and sustainability over novelty. When implemented with these safeguards, immersive technologies can nurture psychological safety and empowerment, allowing all learners, regardless of ability, to explore, communicate, and co-create knowledge on equal footing.

As immersive technologies evolve alongside artificial intelligence, ethical considerations now extend beyond physical and sensory safety to include **data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and adaptive content**

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governance. Many immersive learning platforms collect biometric, behavioral, and gaze-tracking data to tailor experiences. While such personalization enhances engagement, it also raises concerns regarding consent, data retention, and the potential for algorithmic bias (Floridi et al., 2023). Educators and policymakers must therefore establish clear digital-ethics frameworks that ensure **responsible AI integration**, protect learner autonomy, and prevent discrimination against neurodiverse populations. Embedding ethics-by-design principles in immersive learning systems will safeguard trust and uphold the inclusive intent of educational innovation.

Theme	Description	Representative Studies	Outcomes
Engagement	Motivation, presence, flow	Howard et al. (2022), Lorenzo et al. (2019)	Increased attention, enjoyment
Accessibility	UDL-based design, mobile AR	CAST (2018), Lee & Kim (2020)	Improved inclusion & cost-efficiency
Transferability	Real-world skill generalization	Parong & Mayer (2018), Chen et al. (2023)	Better social communication
Ethics	Privacy, sensory safety, digital equity	Hansen et al. (2023)	Responsible adoption

Table1: Thematic Synthesis of Immersive Learning Benefits and Challenges
Note. The table summarizes the four primary thematic dimensions identified in the review: Engagement and Motivation, Accessibility and Scalability, Transferability of Learning, and Ethical and Safety Considerations.

5. DISCUSSION

Broader Relevance for Inclusive Learning Environments

As summarised in Table 1, immersive learning enhances motivation and accessibility but also presents challenges related to digital ethics and resource equity. The findings of this review extend beyond their immediate therapeutic implications to illustrate how immersive technologies can **transform mainstream education** into a more inclusive and empathetic ecosystem. By enabling individualized pacing, sensory modulation, and experiential engagement, Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR) provide a *shared pedagogical language* through which both neurotypical and neurodiverse learners can participate meaningfully.

From a broader perspective, immersive learning aligns with the **philosophy of inclusive education**, which envisions classrooms as heterogeneous communities where differences are resources rather than deficits (UNESCO, 2020). The reviewed studies demonstrate that VR/AR interventions originally designed for learners with Autism or learning disabilities often yield *secondary benefits* for their neurotypical peers, such as improved empathy, collaboration, and communicative clarity (Howard et al., 2022). When teachers adopt these tools universally, immersive technologies cease to be "special needs aids" and become catalysts of **pedagogical equity**.

Moreover, the principles that underpin effective immersive learning, **multimodal engagement, immediate feedback, and contextualized practice,** are consistent with modern constructivist and experiential learning frameworks (Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). In neurodiverse settings, these principles translate into tangible gains: dyslexic learners visualize phonemes in 3D AR; students with ADHD sustain attention in goal-oriented simulations; and autistic learners rehearse social routines in controlled, gamified VR spaces (Chu et al., 2019; Ip et al., 2018). Yet the same mechanisms, embodiment, feedback, presence, also enhance learning outcomes for general education students, suggesting that *inclusive design is synonymous with effective design*.

At the policy level, immersive learning supports the goals of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)** by promoting equitable access to technology-driven education. Implementing such innovations at scale, however, requires addressing systemic constraints: inadequate teacher training, cost barriers, and uneven infrastructure. Professional development programs must equip educators not merely to operate immersive tools, but to embed them within pedagogical intentions that prioritize inclusion and ethical responsibility (Hansen et al., 2023).

The **broader relevance** of these technologies lies in their power to reshape classroom culture. When thoughtfully designed, immersive environments can nurture empathy among neurotypical students, reduce stigma, and promote social connectedness, a finding echoed in studies where shared VR experiences improved peer cooperation and emotional understanding (Lorenzo et al., 2019). Thus, immersive learning is not an isolated technological trend but an *evolution in inclusive pedagogy*, fostering communication, creativity, and compassion across diverse learner profiles.

6. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR GEN Z

Pedagogical and Policy-Level Takeaways

The insights from this review suggest that immersive technologies can play a transformative role in shaping how **Generation Z** learns, interacts, and constructs meaning in inclusive classrooms. As digital natives, Gen Z learners thrive in environments that are interactive, visually rich, and socially connected. When designed through

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inclusive principles, **Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed Reality (VR/AR/MR)** platforms can foster participation, empathy, and collaboration among students with diverse cognitive and learning profiles.

Pedagogical Implications

First, immersive technologies provide educators with tools to actualize **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles in practice. Teachers can offer multiple means of representation (e.g., visual simulations for abstract concepts), engagement (e.g., gamified feedback loops), and expression (e.g., multimodal storytelling) (CAST, 2018). This flexibility ensures that lessons accommodate learners with **Autism Spectrum Disorder**, dyslexia, or attention-related challenges, while simultaneously enriching experiences for neurotypical peers.

Second, immersive environments promote **experiential and inquiry-based learning,** two approaches central to the Gen Z learning ethos. Students are not passive recipients of information but active co-creators within digital ecosystems (Kolb, 1984). By exploring virtual laboratories, historical reconstructions, or social-skills simulations, learners develop both conceptual understanding and metacognitive awareness. Importantly, immersive tasks can integrate **social-emotional learning (SEL)** components that enhance perspective-taking and empathy, bridging divides between neurotypical and neurodiverse learners (Howard et al., 2022).

Third, educators must be supported through **professional learning** that emphasizes pedagogical integration rather than technological novelty. Training should cover lesson design, differentiation strategies, and classroom management within immersive contexts. Evidence from implementation studies indicates that teacher confidence and efficacy directly influence learner outcomes (Parsons et al., 2021). Thus, capacity building remains the linchpin of sustainable inclusion.

Policy-Level Implications

At a systems level, educational policymakers should recognize immersive learning as part of a broader **digital-inclusion agenda** aligned with the United Nations' **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)**. Investment in accessible hardware, open-source software, and adaptive content can democratize access to immersive education across socioeconomic contexts (UNESCO, 2020).

Furthermore, policies must safeguard **ethical and equitable implementation**. Guidelines should address data privacy, age-appropriate exposure, and sensory safety, ensuring that technology enhances rather than overwhelms learners (Hansen et al., 2023). Collaboration between educators, technologists, and mental-health professionals can yield ethical frameworks that prioritize learner dignity and psychological well-being.

Finally, immersive learning initiatives should be evaluated not solely by technological efficiency but by their contribution to **inclusive culture,** measured through indicators such as peer cooperation, reduction in stigma, and student voice. When VR, AR, and MR are embedded within participatory school cultures, they can transform education from content delivery into **shared human experience**, aligning with the aspirations of Gen Z for empathy, equity, and global citizenship.

6.1 Limitations and Future Scope

While this review offers a comprehensive synthesis of immersive learning research from 2015–2025, several limitations should be acknowledged. The majority of the included studies were conducted in high-income, Western educational contexts, which may limit the generalizability of findings to diverse sociocultural or resource-constrained environments. Additionally, most interventions featured small sample sizes and short experimental durations, restricting long-term inferences about behavioral or cognitive retention. Future research should therefore explore **cross-cultural and longitudinal applications of immersive learning**, particularly in low- and middle-income settings, and assess **scalable policy models** for equitable access to immersive technologies. Integrating mixed-method designs and learner perspectives will further enrich understanding of how immersive environments influence inclusion, empathy, and communication across educational contexts.

7. CONCLUSION

Immersive Technology as a Catalyst for Connection between Neurodiverse and Neurotypical Learners

The synthesis of recent evidence affirms that immersive technologies: Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR), are not merely instructional innovations but transformative **catalysts for connection and inclusion** in contemporary education. When designed with empathy, accessibility, and pedagogical intent, these technologies create spaces where neurodiverse and neurotypical learners can engage as equals in shared experiences of exploration, expression, and understanding.

Through immersive simulations, learners who once experienced barriers in communication, attention, or sensory processing can now participate in interactive scenarios that foster self-efficacy and confidence. Simultaneously, neurotypical peers benefit from heightened awareness, empathy, and collaborative skills-developing what educators increasingly recognize as *digital social-emotional literacy* (Howard et al., 2022). This mutual enrichment underscores the idea that inclusive design benefits all, dissolving distinctions between "mainstream" and "special" education.

At a conceptual level, immersive learning epitomizes a **pedagogy of presence,** where embodiment, feedback, and engagement converge to create transformative encounters between learners and content (Kolb, 1984; Parong & Mayer, 2018). It represents a new form of educational interaction: sensory, social, and reflective. By

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contextualizing knowledge within multisensory and emotionally safe environments, immersive media enable learners to construct meaning collaboratively rather than hierarchically.

The future of inclusive education for Generation Z thus lies in **co-designing learning environments** that celebrate diversity as an asset. Policymakers, educators, and researchers must continue to ensure that access, ethics, and equity guide every technological adoption. If implemented thoughtfully, immersive technologies can function not as tools of separation or remediation, but as **mediums of connection,** cultivating empathy, communication, and shared human understanding in the digital age.

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DIGITAL DISTRACTION, STRESS, AND MENTAL WELL-BEING: A STUDY OF GEN Z ASPIRANTS' STUDY PATTERNS AND COPING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

In today's world, technology is changing incredibly fast, and this rapid pace has transformed how people live and how different age groups are defined. One such group, Generation Z (Gen Z), is especially important right now. Because they have recently entered the workforce and higher education, it is crucial to study how they navigate this technology-driven environment to succeed. This includes looking closely at how they manage their academic lives. Gen Z students who are preparing for demanding competitive exams face serious challenges, such as controlling their focus, managing high stress, and protecting their mental well-being. Although digital devices help them study, they also act as a major source of distraction. This constant digital use often makes it hard for students to control themselves, leading to unnecessary procrastination.

The primary objective of the study is to explore association between Digital Distraction (DD), Study Habits (SH), Perceived Exam Stress (PES) and Mental Well Being (MWB) among Genz aspirants preparing for competitive exams. Additionally, to analyse the prevalence and magnitude of digital distraction, perceived exam stress, study habits, overall mental well -being and digital self -regulating strategies among Gen Z aspirants.

This research uses a Quantitative Survey Method with a questionnaire based on validated Likert scale to collect data from competitive exam aspirants from Ahmedabad city. Data analysis is done using Statistical software SPSS. The Findings suggests that digital distraction significantly impact the perceived exam stress. Additionally, interdependence was found in study habits, self-regulating strategies and mental wellbeing but no significant relation was observed between digital distraction and other variable which indicates that digital distractions exist, but their impact on Gen Z aspirants appears limited.

Key Words: *Digital Distraction, Study Habits, Competitive Exam Stress, Mental Well-Being, Digital Self-regulation, Genz Aspirants*

INTRODUCTION

In the new Technological Era, Where the world uses digital devices like phone, laptop, smart watches, AI-driven apps for almost everything. This is specially for young generation called as Generation Z (Gen Z) individuals born between 1996 and 2012, According to (Stillman & Stillman, 2018 as cited in (Hendrastomo & Januarti, 2023) research, they identified seven main qualities of Genz: they blend the real world and the digital world together (Phygital), they always want things customized to fit their identity, They are very realistic about their future, They have strong fear of missing out (FOMO), They favour sharing economies and partnership (Weconomist), They are highly independent and believe they can learn anything themselves (Do It Yourself-DIY) and they are very competitive. These traits define how they interact with world.

Young generation are using technologies for communication, entertainment, academic purpose, for information. Information technology was created to make it easier for humans to experience significant role enhancements. Students seem to not be able to live without technology, in many cases using technology for things that are not in accordance with their designation.(Hendrastomo & Januarti, 2023). This technology is becoming an essential part of their daily life; This technology is helpful for studying, but it also creates a major problem: digital distraction. Digital distraction means using phones or social media instead of focusing on schoolwork. According to a 2018 survey by the technology company Asurion, Americans check their mobile phones an average of 80 times a day; the highest users surveyed topped 300 daily checks. But each time we interrupt something we were doing to check our phones, we break our concentration and have to start over.(*Staying Focused in the Era of Digital Distractions - Harvard Health*, n.d.) This distraction can seriously hurt how well students study and prepare for their important exams. The problem is made worse because these students are also under a lot of pressure to pass competitive exams. This pressure leads to exam stress. When students are stressed and distracted, their study habits often get worse. All these problems together-distraction, stress, and poor study habits can damage a student's overall mental well-being

This study aims to clearly look at how common these problems are (like distraction and stress) and how strong the link is between them. We want to understand how digital distraction, stress, study habits, and self-regulation all connect and affect the mental well-being of young aspirants. Our findings will help create better ways to support these students so they can study effectively and stay mentally healthy.

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LITERATURE REVIEW:

Digital Distraction

In this modern technological era, technology has become an absolute necessity in daily life. for students, the use of digital devices in their studies is essential. there is a positive side of using technology, it simplifies task like assignment submission, provide access to educational resources anytime and anywhere and it is removing geographical limit of learning. However, the negative impact of digital devices cannot be neglect. Technology enables learning it also act as primary source of distraction. Digital distraction is the situation where individual shifting their attention from work to digital devices or certain application that causes distraction. Digital distractions stem from both internal and external factors. Internal distractions arise from thoughts and mental interruptions, while external distractions are triggered by device notifications, vibrations, and sounds. These distractions not only reduce students' focus but also slow down their learning processes, leading to delayed and obstructed academic achievements.(Central University of Punjab & Mondal, 2024)

A specific type of Digital Distraction often found in education is called academic cyberloafing, which refers to students voluntarily using internet services for personal activities—like browsing social media or watching videos—when they should be focusing on their studies.(Nweke et al., 2024) Studies show that academic cyberloafing is positively related to academic stress and fatigue; meaning, the more students engage in this digital avoidance, the higher their overall stress becomes. .(Nweke et al., 2024)

Research found that Digital distraction significantly reduce student's ability to focus on their studies. This challenge is often rooted in poor self- regulation and time management skills, making students highly susceptible to constant digital overuse. Students are more likely to engage in these distracting activities during study time, when they are already stressed about their performance and high workload.

Perceived Exam Stress

Stress is defined as body's nonspecific reaction to demands made on it. It is a process by which we perceive and cope with environmental threats and challenges. Hence, stress is defined as emotional and behavioural changes caused by stressors.(Prof. Loknath Mishra, 2021)

Stress is an organism's response to a stressor such as an environmental condition. Stress is the body's method of reacting to a challenge.(Shrivastava & Rajan, 2019)

Stress is understood simply as the process of how an individual views and reacts to difficult challenges. Since every student is different, they naturally perceive stress in unique ways when facing high-pressure situations, such as exams. stress significantly affects both academic performance and emotional health, posing a major challenge for students preparing for competitive tests. This stress often comes from specific sources that directly affect self-esteem, focus, and decision-making, such as high peer competition, parental expectations, social pressure, and harsh self-criticism.(Sarkar, n.d.)

The research clearly shows that students preparing for competitive exams, experience high levels of stress from four main areas: academic demands, parental pressure, personal worries, and environmental factors. However, students preparing for competitive tests are particularly more likely to have negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depression. The highly competitive atmosphere, combined with intense pressure for success and high expectations from parents, severely affects the student's mind. This stress directly leads to problems like lack of concentration, negative feelings toward themselves, and lack of sleep among the majority of students.(Prof. Loknath Mishra, 2021)

Mental Well-Being

Mental well Being is How you think, feel and act. Mental wellbeing is more than just the absence of mental illness, but also includes psychological functioning, life satisfaction, and ability to develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. (Tennant et al., 2007) Increased stress is considered an important cause for lowered mental wellbeing, as persistent stress is associated with an increased risk of mental disorders, a deteriorated quality of life and a decrease in study success (Frajerman A,2019 as cited in (Slimmen et al., 2022)

Research shows that perceived stress has a strong negative relationship with mental well-being, meaning that as a student's stress goes up, their overall mental health goes down significantly. In fact, perceived stress alone accounted for almost half (45%) of all the differences observed in students' mental well-being scores.

This negative effect is largely due to the specific problems students face: academic pressure was found to have the strongest damaging impact on mental well-being compared to all other stressors. The high levels of anxiety and pressure are responsible for explaining 42% of the variations observed in students' mental health.

Study Habit

Study habit is; buying out a dedicated scheduled and un-interrupted time to apply one's self to the task of learning. Without it, one does not grow and becomes self –limiting in life. Study habits tell a person that how much he will learn and how far he wants to go, and how much he wants to earn.(Rabia et al., 2017) Study habits are student's ways of studying whether systematic, efficient or inefficient (Ayodele & Adebiyi, 2013 as cited in (Khan, 2016)

The studies have shown that productive studying strategies, including time management, note-taking strategies, and self-control strategies can be a protective factor that could help manage adverse effects of academic stress (Crede & Kuncel, 2008; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2014 as cited in ("International Research Journal of Arts,

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Humanities and Social Sciences (IRJAHSS)," 2025) Students who study in structured manner are better at managing academic stress , which also lead to improvement in their academic performance(Chen et al., 2017) Based on the literature reviewed, we have come up with the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES:

To analyse the prevalence and magnitude of digital distraction, perceived exam stress, study habits, overall mental wellbeing and digital self -regulating strategies among Gen Z aspirants preparing for competitive exams.
To investigate the association and its direction among digital distraction, exam stress, study habits, mental well -being and Digital self-regulating strategies among Gen Z aspirants preparing for competitive exams.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The study adopted a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine the relationships among digital distraction, study habits, exam stress, mental well-being and digital self-regulating strategies among Gen-Z aspirants. A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was used to collect primary data. The sample consisted of 106 students in Ahmedabad who are preparing for competitive exams through convenience sampling.
The instrument measures Digital Distraction (DD) using items adapted from the Smartphone Distraction Scale (Throuvala et al., 2021), Study Habits (SH) (Siewert, n.d.) from a standard checklist, using a 5-point frequency scale, Competitive Exam Stress (CES) (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015) via items adapted from academic stress scales and Mental Well-being (MWB) (Zullig, 2009) using satisfaction items akin to the Satisfaction with Life Scale.
The directional scoring is managed such that higher scores indicate worse distraction/stress but better study habits/well-being for their respective scales, providing comprehensive data for analysis.
Data were analysed using SPSS. The following statistical techniques were employed:
Descriptive Statistics: Mean and Standard deviation for each variable. Pearson's Correlation Analysis to examine linear relationship among the five variables. Demographic Analysis to explore difference across gender, age group and academic levels.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

This study on 106 young aspirants has a clear demographic profile: The participants are predominately Gen Z (over half are 17-22 years old) and are mostly female (57.5%). They are also highly educated, with the largest groups holding postgraduation (35.8%) or undergraduates (26.4%) degrees, and are focused on high level professional exams like CA/CS/ICWA/CMA (34%) and government service exams. Most participants are relatively new to preparation with two-thirds studying for less than one year, and the majority (50%) conduct their studies at home. This combination of Youth, high academic focus and newness to preparation cycle often while studying at home provides a rich context for analysing their unique challenges with digital distraction and self - regulation.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
DD	3.1300	.90741	106
SH	3.0472	1.22707	106
ES	2.6840	.87949	106
MB	3.6321	.89523	106
DSR	3.1189	.88276	106

Table 1 Mean, Standard deviation between the variable (Authors own contribution)
The analysis of the 106 aspirants provides a clear view of the magnitude (average level) of the core study variables.
Mental well-being
Aspirants reported the highest average score in Mental well-being (Mean=3.63), Suggesting that on average, the group reports an above-moderate level of overall mental health.
Exam stress
Exam stress (Mean=2.68) registered the lowest average score, indicating that aspirants generally do not perceive extremely high level of stress related to exam.
Digital Distraction and Digital self- regulation
Both Digital Distraction (Mean=3.13) and Digital self-regulation (Mean=3.12) have very similar average scores, suggesting that aspirants experience a moderate level of distraction but also use moderate self-regulating strategies to manage it. This near equal mean might imply that regulation efforts are successful in keeping the distraction from becoming extreme.
Study Habits

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The mean score of study habits (Mean=3.05) is also moderate. Importantly, this variable has the highest Standard deviation (SD= 1.23). This large spread shows that while the average score is moderate, there is a wide variation in this study habits among the participants, some have very good study habits and others have very poor ones. This variance is much higher than that of stress or mental well-being, which have SD values below 0.90.

To investigate the interrelationship between digital distraction, exam stress, study habits, mental wellbeing and digital self-regulating strategies.

In order to examine whether there exist any interrelationships between study variables we conducted person's correlation analysis. Correlation matrix was generated with the help of SPSS software among digital distraction (DD), study habits (SH), exam stress (ES), mental wellbeing (MB), and digital self-regulating strategies (DSR) of Gen- Z preparing for competitive exam and several statistically significant associations were found demonstrating expressive behavioural and psychological patterns among the Gen-Z aspirants. The correlation matrix presented in Table 2 shows the strength and direction of associations among the variables.

Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

		MW	DD	SH	ES	DSRCS
MW	Pearson Correlation	1	.052	**.218***	**.252****	**.324****
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.595	.025	.009	.001
	N	106	106	106	106	106
DD	Pearson Correlation	.052	1	.108	**.282****	.040
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.595		.273	.003	.686
	N	106	106	106	106	106
SH	Pearson Correlation	**.218***	.108	1	-.027	**.468****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.273		.782	.000
	N	106	106	106	106	106
ES	Pearson Correlation	**.252****	**.282****	-.027	1	**-.191***
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.003	.782		.050
	N	106	106	106	106	106
DSRCS	Pearson Correlation	**.324****	.040	**.468****	**-.191***	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.686	.000	.050	
	N	106	106	106	106	106

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (Auther's own Contribution)

A significant positive relationship was found between Digital Distraction and level of exam stress ($r = .282$, $p < .01$), indicating that Gen-Z aspirants who are digitally more distracted tend to have higher level of exam stress as extreme mobile use, multitasking, and digital interruptions may result into reduced academic focus and poor exam preparation, which in turn cause self-doubt and over thinking about their performance during exam making them anxious and stressed.

The correlation analysis further indicated a meaningful interconnected pattern among study habits, mental wellbeing, and digital self-regulating strategies. Positive associations were found between study habits and mental wellbeing ($r = .218$, $p < .05$), Mental wellbeing and digital self-regulation ($r = .324$, $p < .001$), along with strong positive relation between study habits and digital self-regulating strategies ($r = .468$, $p < .001$) at significance levels of 5%, 1% and 1% respectively. This suggests that the Gen-Z aspirants with regulated study habits comprising disciplined routines, prearranged schedules and regular academic discourse experiences lesser academic pressure which enhances their psychological health and result into higher mental wellbeing. The study also found that Gen-Z aspirants who are academically well organised are also able to limit their digital usage without being distracted and this successful implementation of digital self-regulating strategies lead them towards improved emotional balance and overall life satisfaction. Contrary to this, a significant negative relationship was found between exam stress and digital self-regulating strategies ($r = –.191$, $p < .05$) highlighting that, Gen-Z aspirants who fail to implement their digital regulating strategies, tend to experience higher exam stress as lower digital self-regulation may lead to procrastination, incomplete preparation, and ultimately greater stress.

The results reported one unexpected positive relationship between exam stress and mental wellbeing ($r = .252$, $p < .01$) which is usually found negative. This statistical evidence might be interpreted as Gen-Z aspirants who experience higher level of stress remain aware and active, turning their exam stress as a motivating factor, ultimately managing their mental wellbeing. Though the scope remains for further researchers to inquire on the same with different sample as this finding needs to be tested more to get accurate results.

Lastly, no significant associations were found between digital distraction - study habits and digital distraction - mental wellbeing indicating that distracted Gen-Z aspirants do not necessarily exhibit poor study behaviour or disturbed mental wellbeing.

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CONCLUSION:

The overall findings of the study suggests that in spite of being surrounded by digitally challenging environment where it is getting difficult to balance the distraction along with advantages of digitalization, Gen z aspirants of the competitive exam appear to cultivate adaptive behaviours that help them manage their academic responsibilities effectively. The regular study habits coupled with the digital self-regulating strategies have contributed in decreasing the exam stress levels and enhancing the level of overall mental wellbeing. The niche target population – Young, academically sound and highly ambitious Gen Z add more novelty to the study. The nature of interdependent relationships among study habits, mental wellbeing, and digital self-regulation strategies indicate that structured academic behaviour and responsible technology use reinforce each other, ultimately supporting healthier and more productive learning experiences. These insights highlight the evolving capacity of Gen Z learners to navigate academic pressures while balancing the demands of a digitally intensive world.

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DIGITAL-NATIVE CONSUMERS: UNDERSTANDING GEN Z'S OMNI-CHANNEL PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR IN AHMEDABAD

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Abstract

This study investigates the omni-channel purchase intention and channel switching behavior of Digital-Native Consumers (Gen Z) in the context of apparel retail in Ahmedabad, India. As a cohort representing 377 million individuals and projected to influence $2 trillion of the Indian economy by 2035, Gen Z's seamless transition between online and offline touchpoints necessitates a unified retail strategy. Study examines the determinants of omni-channel clothing purchase behaviour among Gen Z consumers in Ahmedabad, a metropolitan context characterised by high digital adoption, strong UPI penetration, and growing social commerce engagement. Drawing from an extensive review of literature, the study integrates seven constructs—perceived convenience, channel integration quality, technology readiness, trust, shopping enjoyment, channel switching intention, and omni-channel purchase intention—into a comprehensive analytical framework. Adopting a descriptive research design with a sample of 250 Gen Z consumers in Western Ahmedabad, the research develops a framework to empirically examine the influence of six key antecedents on purchase outcomes. Using percentage analysis, Chi-square, ANOVA, and Principal Component Analysis show strong positive influence of Perceived Convenience, Technology Readiness, and Shopping Enjoyment on engagement, with over 78% of respondents expressing enjoyment in multi-channel browsing. However, trust formation remains cautious, and inconsistencies in Channel Integration Quality, particularly in promotional parity and guarantee policies, emerge as significant friction points that influence Trust in Channel and Channel Switching Intention.

The study confirms that omni-channel purchase intent among Ahmedabad's Gen Z is a function of utilitarian convenience, hedonic enjoyment, technological confidence, and the retail brand's commitment to consistent, trustworthy cross-channel integration. The study offers actionable insights for apparel retailers seeking to optimize omni-channel strategies for a generation that prioritises convenience, authenticity, integration, and immersive experiences.

Keywords: *Digital-Native Consumers (Gen Z), Omni-Channel Purchase Intention, Channel Switching Intention, Perceived Convenience, Channel Integration Quality, Technology Readiness, Trust in Channel, Shopping Enjoyment.*

PROFILE OF INDIA'S GEN Z:

India's Generation Z—those born between **1997 and 2012**—has emerged as a demographic and economic force that is reshaping the country's consumption landscape. At **377 million individuals**, this cohort is larger than the entire population of the United States and represents the single biggest generational segment in India. Their growing economic participation, coupled with distinct digital-native behaviour and value systems, is redefining how money is earned, spent, and influenced.

Earning Profile of Gen Z: Early Workforce Entry and Growing Economic Clout

A defining characteristic of India's Gen Z is their **early integration into the workforce**. Currently, **1 in 4 Gen Z individuals (25%)** is already earning, and this proportion is projected to grow rapidly—**36% will be earning by 2030**, and **nearly 47% by 2035**. This rapid rise in income participation signifies not only an expansion in direct spending power but also an accelerating influence on household decisions. Many Gen Z earners engage in **flexible, diversified income activities**, such as part-time jobs, content creation, tutoring, and gig-based assignments. Even small earnings, such as taking math tuition or freelancing online, hold meaningful purchasing power due to this group's value-conscious behaviour. Their independence increases as they migrate to metros, manage their own expenses, and learn to navigate urban cost structures.

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Spending Dynamics: A Generation Driving India's Consumption Economy

Gen Z is already responsible for a substantial portion of India's consumer expenditure. As of today, they directly or indirectly drive **$860 billion** of India's total spending—**43% of all consumer spends in the country**. Their influence spans high-involvement categories such as **fashion, travel, beauty, F&B, entertainment, and consumer electronics**, where they contribute between **44% and 50% of total category spend**.

Core Spending Behaviour: Smart, Trend-Driven, and Highly Visual

Gen Z stands out not for spending recklessly but for being **calculated value-seekers**. While they shop as frequently as millennials, they conduct **1.5× more research** before making a purchase. Review platforms, influencers, creator content, and peer recommendations are integral to their decision-making.

Key spending behaviour characteristics of Gen Z

1. Trend-first orientation:

Gen Z prioritises what's new and culturally relevant. Trends are 1.7× more important to them than brand names.

2. Visual-first shopping journeys:

Nearly 80% rely on immersive visuals, AR try-ons, lenses, and creator videos to decide what to buy.

3. Phygital purchase behaviour:

They move seamlessly between online and offline.

4. Over 54% stay online even while physically inside stores, comparing prices, checking creator reviews, or confirming trends.

5. Shopcializing (shopping + socializing):

About 64% share snaps from trial rooms, take live feedback from friends, and often require social validation before making purchases.

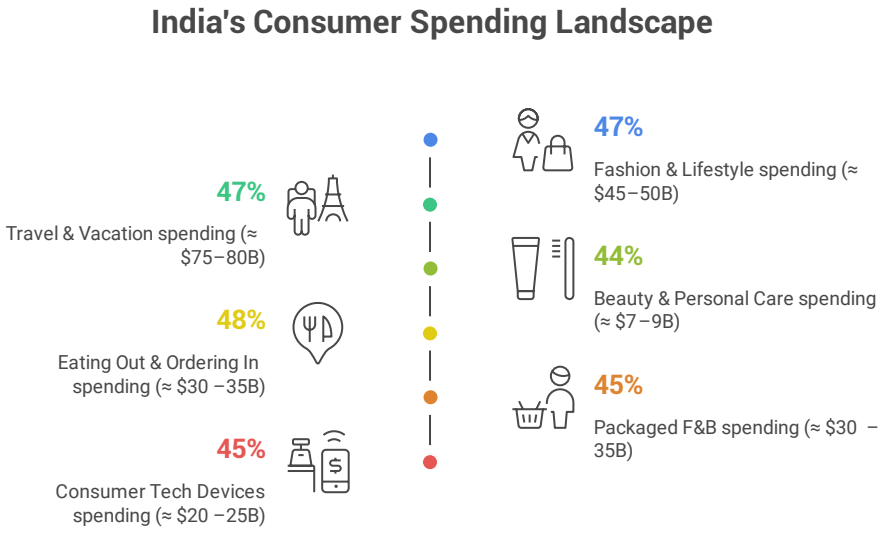
6. Influencer-driven discovery:

72% use creator pages as search engines for fashion, beauty, and lifestyle products. A product not endorsed by creators often remains invisible to them.

Category-Wise Spending Power

Gen Z drives nearly **half of all spending** in several major sectors:

Figure: 1



This reveals that Gen Z is not just a youth segment but a central driver across everyday consumption.

Toward a $2 Trillion Gen Z Economy

By 2035, Gen Z's cumulative impact will reach $2 trillion, meaning every second rupee spent in India will be influenced or decided by a Gen Z consumer. Their unique blend of authenticity, digital fluency, trend affinity, and economic participation will reshape marketing playbooks, product innovation cycles, and omnichannel strategies. Brands that recognise their spending power today and adapt with speed—through trend responsiveness, immersive experiences, influencer ecosystems, and seamless omni-channel journeys—will be at the forefront of capturing this unprecedented $2 trillion opportunity. By 2035, the cohort's direct annual spending is expected to jump from the current $200 billion to an extraordinary $1.8 trillion, reflecting the speed at which their earning capacity is growing. This signals one of the strongest future consumers markets globally.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Berry, L. L., Seiders, K., & Grewal, D. (2002) believes that retail convenience and Gen Z omni-channel behaviour. The researchers are of the opinion that service-convenience as a multi-dimensional, time-and-effort construct that strongly conditions consumers' channel choices and repeat behaviour. Convenience reduces non-monetary costs (time, cognitive and physical effort) and so increases the probability of transactional follow-through—an effect particularly salient for fast, frequent purchase categories that typify many Gen Z purchases.
Jiang, L., Yang, Z., & Jun, M. (2013) development efforts for **online shopping convenience** refines this by identifying five online-specific dimensions (access, search, evaluation, transaction, possession/post-purchase) and showing that search, transaction and possession convenience predict repurchase intentions—important when mapping Gen Z shoppers who combine mobile search with in-store fulfilment. Researchers had indicated indirectly that digital natives and perceived convenience must be measured across both online and offline touchpoints covering various aspects like app access speed, ease of product search, checkout simplicity, and delivery/return reliability. Over and above Gen Z's short attention spans and high opportunity costs make these dimensions critical antecedents of omni-channel adoption and loyalty.

Sousa, R., & Voss, C. A. (2006) has examined channel-integration quality as the operational backbone of omnichannel experiences. Researchers have conceptualized of multi-channel → omni-channel evolution frames integration quality as the retailer's ability to present seamless product, pricing and information flows across touchpoints; empirical and conceptual pieces collected in the omni-channel literature show that better online–offline integration produces synergies (higher convenience, lower perceived risk) rather than mere channel cannibalization. The research work revealed that Gen Z consumers, who routinely switch between in-app search, social posts and physical stores, high integration quality (consistent information, synchronized inventory, smooth cross-channel returns) will reduce friction in channel switching and elevate omni-channel purchase intention. Channel integration level can be measured with the help of integration quality in the form of cross-channel consistency in catalog, price, promotions, inventory visibility, and unified fulfilment policies.

Parasuraman's (2000) has examined the effect of technology readiness. Researcher has concluded that Technology readiness provides a foundational framework for understanding individual differences in the acceptance and use of emerging technologies. The researcher has identified positive drivers to adopt technology like optimism and innovativeness and also identified negative inhibitors like discomfort and insecurity. This research work also emphasizing on Technology readiness can be useful for predicting technology adoption behaviour, segmenting users based on readiness profiles, and informing service design and communication strategies in technology-enabled environments. Technology readiness of the retailer can provide a competitive advantage to the retailer over others and can gain decent market share in the market.
Pavlou, P. A. (2003) is of the opinion that trust is one of the major concerns for the consumer while buying product online or through digital platform. Researchers are of the opinion that online transactions are with perceived risk. Channel credibility plays significant role in creating and maintain trust for online shoppers. Researcher had examined that Technology Adoption amongst Gen Z is playing significant role in adoption of brand and selection of buying pattern.

Gefen, D., Karahanna, E., & Straub, D. W. (2003) has emphasized on integration of trust and Technology Acceptance Model has been emphasized by the researcher. It had been observed that the **trust** reduces perceived risk and acts as a critical mediator of technology adoption and online transaction intention; in omnichannel contexts trust extends beyond the website to brand and channel promises. Technology adoption is always influenced by Trust factor too.

To, P.-L., Liao, C., & Lin, T.-M. (2007) are of the opinion that Shopping enjoyment and hedonic drivers. To et al. and hedonic shopping literature show that **shopping enjoyment** (emotional gratification) can counterbalance pure convenience motives: enjoyable in-store experiences or gamified mobile journeys amplify engagement and reduce price-only switching. It has been examined with light of Gen Z that "value experiential" and "social elements" are the motivator for shoping. Enjoyment is likely to increase cross-channel exploration (e.g., browsing in-store but buying via app) and strengthen omni-channel intention when combined with seamless integration and trustworthy systems. Measurement should therefore include hedonic items (fun, excitement, social shareability) alongside utilitarian convenience scales.

Gao, F., & Su, X. (2017) had examined channel switching intention and operational antecedents. Researchers are of the concluded that switching behaviour depends on wait sensitivity, perceived net benefit of each channel (time savings, price, assortment), and the availability/usability of self-order technologies. Researchers had suggested that switching intention is not only psychological but also constrained by capacity and service design. Various aspects like mobile pre-order reduces in-store wait and encourages app use; kiosks change in-store flows and thus switching patterns.

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Verhoef, P. C., Kannan, P. K., & Inman, J. J. (2015) had articulated omni-channel purchase intention as the willingness to use multiple integrated channels within a single journey; the reviewed streams show that this intention is jointly determined by perceived convenience (multi-dimensional), integration quality (consistency & fulfilment), technology readiness (capacity to use tech confidently), trust (brand and technical credibility), and shopping enjoyment (affective pull). Consumer's willingness to adopt omni-channel paths had been observed by researcher. However, high perceived integration quality and high trust will show the highest omni-channel buying frequencies. Similarly, low technology adopters or low integration perceptions will either restrict themselves to single channels or switch only when clear gains exist.

The reviewed literature collectively provides a structured foundation for understanding the dynamics that shape Gen Z's omni-channel purchase behaviour in Ahmedabad. Drawing from these studies, the present research integrates functional, experiential, and technological perspectives to explain how digital-native consumers navigate blended online–offline retail environments. The constructs derived from prior work—perceived convenience, channel integration quality, technology readiness, trust, shopping enjoyment, channel switching intention, and omni-channel purchase intention—together form a comprehensive framework for analysing Gen Z decision-making. The conclusion emerging from the literature is that omni-channel behaviour is shaped not by a single factor but by an interconnected set of perceptions that evolve across the shopping journey. Ease of finding, evaluating, purchasing, and receiving products establishes the basic utilitarian value that Gen Z expects as standard. The consistency and smoothness of experiences across channels further influence satisfaction and willingness to engage with brands that integrate digital and physical touchpoints effectively. Technology readiness differentiates confident adopters from more cautious users, while trust—both in platform security and brand reliability—remains fundamental in reducing perceived risk. Hedonic motivations, such as shopping enjoyment, add an emotional layer that can amplify engagement beyond purely functional evaluations. Incorporating situational triggers through short decision scenarios allows assessment of switching tendencies under real-world pressures, such as stockouts or price changes. Finally, recognizing contextual influences unique to Ahmedabad, including connectivity quality, preferred digital payment systems, and social media signals, ensures that the model captures both global patterns of Gen Z behaviour and local realities. This integrative approach offers a holistic and context-sensitive understanding essential for studying and predicting omni-channel purchase intentions among Ahmedabad's Gen Z consumers.

RATIONALE OF STUDY:

India's Generation Z (Gen Z) represents the nation's first cohort of digital natives, fundamentally altering the landscape of consumer behavior. This generation is characterized by its seamless navigation across digital and physical touchpoints, creating a fluid, non-linear purchase journey. Specifically, within the retail sector, Gen Z routinely engages in information seeking and price comparison across online channels (e-commerce platforms, brand websites, and mobile applications) before ultimately concluding the transaction either in-store or online, a phenomenon often referred to as omni-channel retailing. This integration of digital discovery and physical fulfillment necessitates that contemporary marketers adopt a strategy of omnipresence to effectively engage this demographic.

The Indian retail ecosystem is being rapidly redefined by several converging technological and infrastructural factors. Widespread smartphone penetration, driven by extensive national infrastructure development, coupled with the swift adoption of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) for digital transactions and the rise of social commerce, has accelerated the digital transformation of retail.

However, the eventual choice of channel and the propensity for inter-channel switching among Gen Z consumers are moderated by a complex interplay of psychological and experiential factors. Key determinants influencing these choices include the consumer's perceived convenience, the level of trust vested in the channel or brand, the assurance of experience consistency across platforms, and the consumer's inherent technology readiness. Consequently, major marketers, including brands such as Indian Terrain, Peter England, and H&M, are actively pursuing strategies that integrate and harmonize their digital and physical customer experiences.

Despite the demonstrable shift toward omni-channel engagement, a significant gap persists in the empirical literature regarding the specific drivers of this behavior among Indian Gen Z consumers. Limited evidence currently explains how this cohort evaluates and switches between channels across diverse product categories. Therefore, this study aims to empirically investigate the antecedents and drivers of omni-channel behavior among Indian Gen Z consumers. This research will utilize Personal Care and Clothing as two representative lifestyle product segments to provide a nuanced understanding of channel preference and switching patterns across varying consumption contexts.

On the basis of above literature work we have trace out on following six variables influencing Gen Z of Ahmedabad city to buy cloths.
Model of Gen Z influence of Shoping Cloths via Omni Channel
Table: 1 Variables and Supporting Literature

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Variable	Supporting Literature (Authors)	Conceptual Definition
Perceived Convenience	Berry et al. (2002); Jiang et al. (2013)	The ease and efficiency perceived while purchasing across multiple channels.
Channel Integration Quality	Sousa & Voss (2006); Verhoef et al. (2015)	The extent to which consumers experience seamless interaction between online and offline channels.
Technology Readiness	Parasuraman (2000)	Consumer's propensity to embrace and use technology confidently during the purchase process.
Trust in Channel	Gefen et al. (2003); Pavlou (2003)	Belief that the brand or platform will act reliably and safeguard consumer interests.
Shopping Enjoyment	To et al. (2007)	Emotional gratification derived from the shopping process across channels.
Channel Switching Intention	Gao & Su (2017)	The tendency to shift from one channel (online/offline) to another for the same purchase.
Omni-Channel Purchase Intention	Lemon & Verhoef (2016)	Willingness to use multiple integrated channels during a single buying journey.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives

1. To understand the buying behaviour of digital-native consumers with respect to clothing.
2. To examine the key factors that influence digital-native consumers while purchasing clothing.

Research Design

The present study has adopted descriptive research design, an approach well-suited for examining consumer behaviour in a systematic and factual manner. As the objective of this research is to analyse the clothing purchase behaviour of Generation Z, the descriptive design enables the researcher to identify, characterize, and interpret the key factors that influence their buying decisions. This approach is appropriate for portraying the overall purchasing patterns of Gen Z in relation to clothing, which often serves as a tangible expression of fashion adoption and personal identity. Marketers of the clothing brands has adopted Omnichannel present for Gen Z consumers. Current research work is also evaluating such initiatives. Through this design, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the determinants shaping Gen Z's clothing consumption behaviour. Data Collection Tool and Technique

Sampling Plan

We have obtained data from Gen-Z consumers residing in Western Ahmedabad. Total Sample size of our work is 250. Equal representation of both genders has been taken care of. Data has been obtained by adopting Convenient Purposive Sampling method.

Statical Tools

Following statistical tools has been used in the current research work.

1. Percentage Analysis: Better Understanding of Each Variable of Gen Z buying behaviour for buying Cloths.
2. Chi-Square: To know the association between various demographic aspects and buying behaviour of Gen Z.
3. ANOVA: To compare means of Buying Behaviour of different group of Gen Z consumers.
4. PCA: Principal Component Analysis (To know the Major factors influencing Gen Z consumers)

Primary Data

Primary data was collected from Gen Z consumers in Ahmedabad using a structured questionnaire administered through a survey method. A Likert scale was employed to measure the intensity of responses across different dimensions of consumer behaviour.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data has been obtained from books, journals, reports and other sources.

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Limitations of Study

The present study is based on a sample of 250 Generation Z respondents from the western region of Ahmedabad. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to other geographical areas or demographic groups across the country. Furthermore, the study employs a convenience sampling technique, which inherently carries certain methodological limitations, including potential sampling bias and reduced representativeness. These constraints should be considered when interpreting the results and their broader applicability.

DATA ANALYSIS:

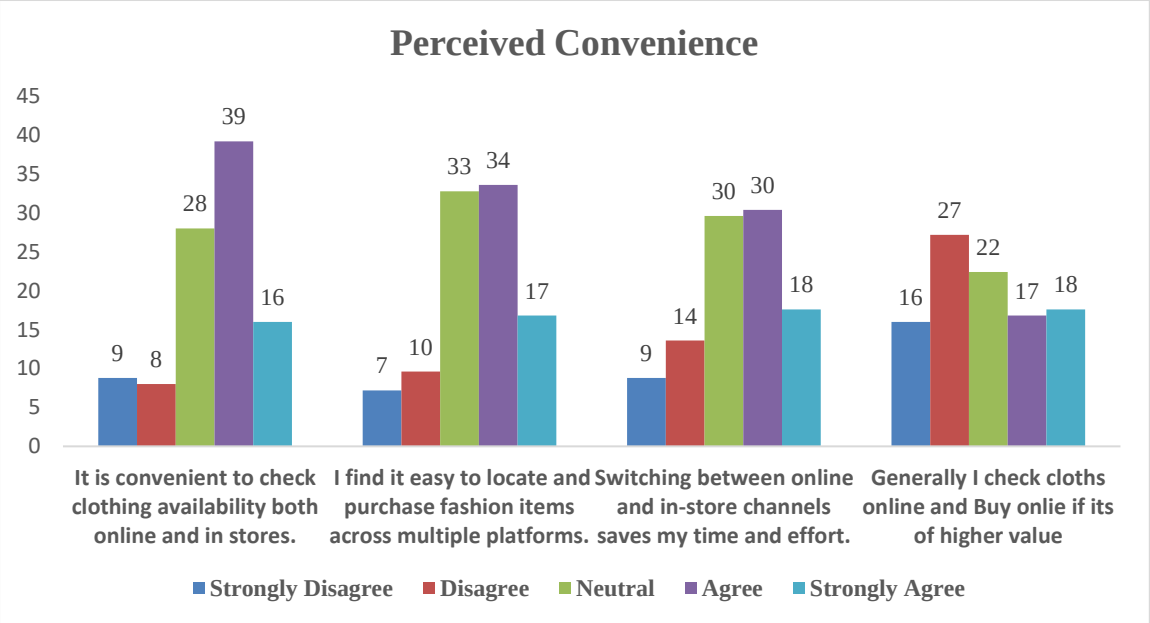
Table: 2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Aspects of Respondents							
Age Group	%	Education	%	Occupation	%	**Spending Pattern**	
18–20	61	Below Graduation	37	Job	9	Rs. 1,001- Rs2,000	24
21-23	26	Graduation	34	Business	15	Rs. 2,001–Rs.3,000	22
24-26	13	Post Graduation	24	Professional	2	Rs. 3,001–Rs.5,000	25
Gender (%)		Other	5	Student	74	Rs.5,001–Rs.7,500	10
Male	54					Rs.7,501–Rs.10,000	7
Female	46					Above Rs.10000	13

Percentage Analysis of various Variables influencing Gen Z to determine Shopping patter for buying cloths.

Chart-1

Perceived Convenience to the Gen Z Consumers for buying Cloths.



The analysis of Perceived Convenience demonstrates a consistently favorable evaluation of omni-channel retailing among respondents. Ease of available information on online basis and at the store provide flexibility to the consumers. For the statement on the convenience of checking clothing availability across online and in-store channels, 39% agree and 16% strongly agree, indicating that over 55% of respondents perceive this feature as beneficial, while only 17% express disagreement.

Likewise, locating and purchasing fashion items across multiple platforms is viewed positively, with 34% agreement and 33% neutrality, revealing that approximately two-thirds of respondents experience platform navigation as smooth, despite a minor 17% expressing disagreement.

A similar response of respondents had been emerged in perceptions of time and effort savings when switching between online and offline channels, where agreement and neutrality each stand at 30%, demonstrating that about 60% acknowledge this efficiency, while less than 23% report any level of disagreement.

However, responses diverge on the practice of checking products online and purchasing in-store for higher-value items. Here, disagreement reaches 27%, neutrality accounts for 22%, and agreement stands at a modest 17%, reflecting a more heterogeneous behavioral inclination.

This variation suggests that while consumers appreciate the structural convenience of omni-channel systems, their personal purchase strategies—especially for high-value items—remain diverse and context-dependent. Overall, the data indicates that consumers largely endorse omni-channel retailing for its convenience, yet shopping behaviour continue to be shaped by individual risk perception, product value considerations, and channel trust dynamics.

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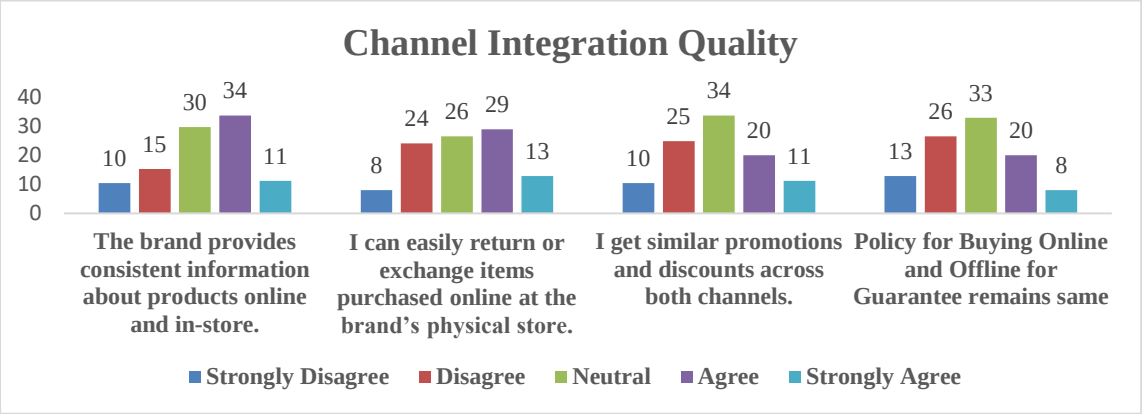
Chart-2
Channel Integration Quality of Marketers



The data on Channel Integration Quality provides important insights into seamless consumers experience on different platforms viz online and offline brand interactions—an essential determinant of digital consumer behaviour in the clothing segment. The results reveal that consumers largely perceive brand communication and policies to be integrated, though certain operational aspects still present friction.

A majority of respondents acknowledge strong consistency in product information across channels, with 34% agreeing and 30% remaining neutral, indicating that nearly two-thirds recognize brands' efforts in harmonizing online and offline communication. This uniformity is critical in shaping trust and reducing decision-making uncertainty in digital apparel purchases.

Similarly, the returns and exchange process—often a significant pain point in online clothing retail—receives positive validation, with 29% agreement and 26% neutrality, showing that over 55% find the integration between digital purchases and in-store resolution effective. However, the presence of 24% disagreement signals that a considerable segment still encounters procedural inconsistencies, which can adversely affect satisfaction and repeat purchase intention.

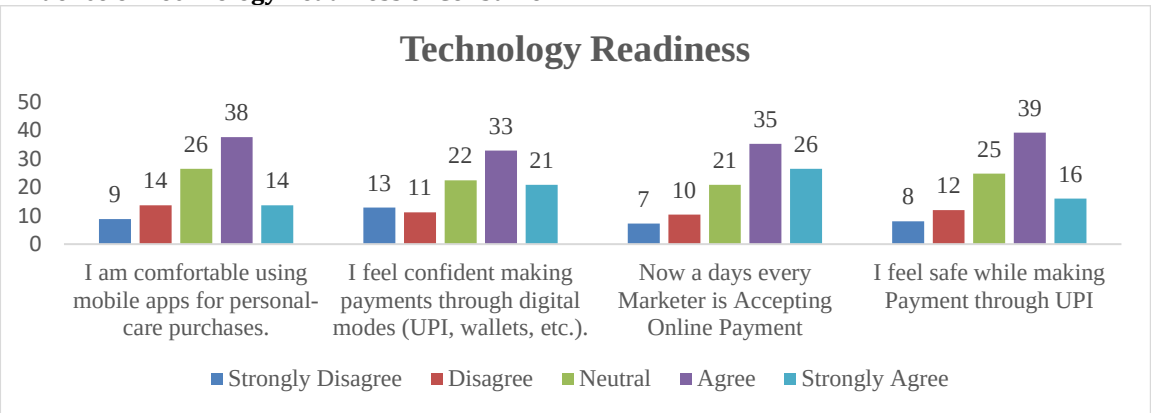
The perception of promotional parity across channels also exhibits moderate favorability. Although 34% express neutrality, and 20% agree, a notable 25% disagree. This data is suggesting that consumers frequently observe discrepancies between online and offline deals. As promotional aspects directly affecting purchasing capacity of the consumers.

For digital clothing shoppers—who are highly value-sensitive and responsive to promotional cues—such inconsistencies may weaken perceived fairness and influence channel preference. The highest level of neutrality (33%) appears for guarantee policy consistency across channels, supported by 20% agreement. Yet the combined disagreement levels of 39% (13% strongly disagree + 26% disagree) indicate that many consumers find brand assurance policies unclear or uneven when shifting between online and physical stores.

Overall, the findings highlight that channel integration quality significantly shapes digital consumer behaviour in apparel retail. When brands provide coherent information, smooth return mechanisms, and uniform policies, consumers develop stronger confidence in omni-channel ecosystems, leading to higher satisfaction, reduced perceived risk, and greater likelihood of channel switching or repeat online purchases.

Conversely, areas of inconsistency—especially in promotions and guarantee policies—act as friction points that may discourage digital engagement, push consumers toward single-channel use, or reduce purchase frequency. Therefore, seamless channel integration emerges as both a facilitator and a boundary condition in shaping modern digital clothing consumption patterns.

Chart- 3
Influence of Technology Readiness of Consumer



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The analysis of Technology Readiness reveals a strong inclination among consumers toward adopting digital tools and payment systems, reflecting high digital maturity in the context of personal-care and retail purchases. A significant proportion of respondents express comfort in using mobile applications, with 38% agreeing and 26% remaining neutral, indicating that nearly two-thirds perceive mobile apps as convenient and easy to use. Only 23% show any level of discomfort, highlighting that resistance to app-based purchasing is relatively low.

Confidence in digital payment modes shows a similar pattern, with 33% agreement and 22% neutrality, suggesting that more than 55% trust digital payment systems such as UPI and wallets. The 24% disagreement, however, signals that a minority still reservations regarding reliability or ease of use.

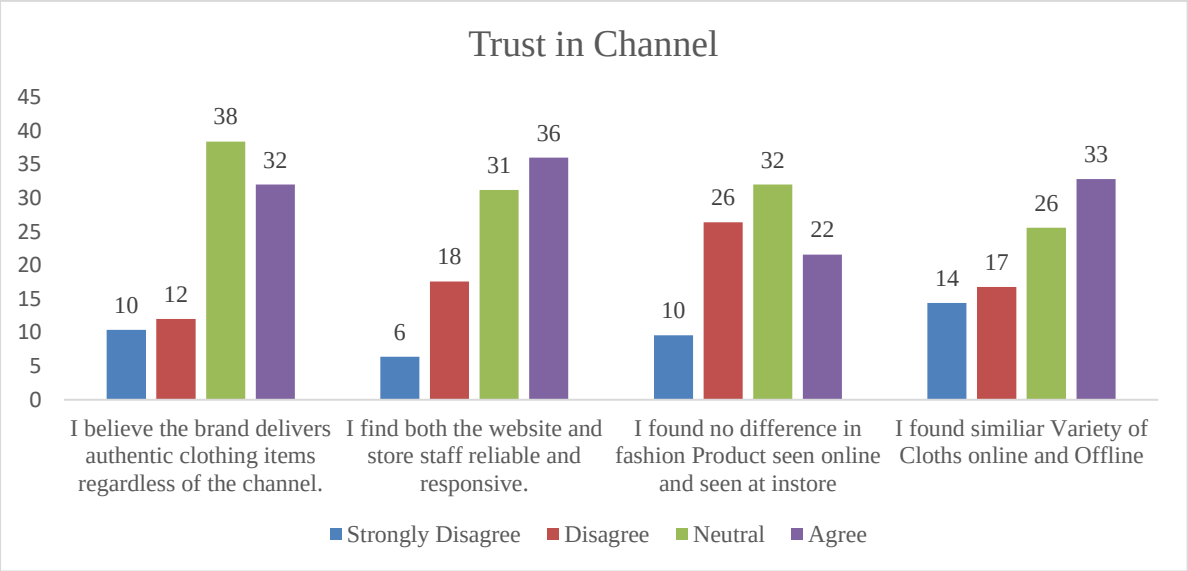
Perceptions about widespread acceptance of online payments by marketers receive strong affirmation, reflected in 35% agreement, 26% strong agreement, and 21% neutrality, collectively demonstrating that over 80% recognize digital payments as a mainstream and universally accepted transaction method. This wide acceptance enhances consumers' willingness to transact digitally and reinforces habitual digital purchasing behaviour.

Safety perceptions regarding UPI payments also emerge as notably positive, with 39% agreement, 25% neutrality, and only 20% disagreement, indicating that a clear majority feel secure using UPI, which is crucial for the sustained growth of digital commerce.

Overall, the findings underscore that technology readiness is a key enabler of digital consumer behaviour, enhancing confidence, reducing perceived risk, and fostering habitual engagement with online platforms.

Consumers' high comfort with mobile apps, strong trust in digital payments, and positive perception of payment safety collectively create an ecosystem conducive to seamless digital purchasing experiences. While a small number of consumers still expresses caution—particularly regarding confidence in using digital modes—the overall readiness levels suggest that the market is well-positioned for accelerated digital adoption, especially within retail segments such as clothing and personal care.

Chart-4
Role of Trust amongst the Gen Z for buying cloths



The data on Trust in Channel provides a nuanced understanding of how Gen Z—often described as digitally fluent, comparison-driven, and authenticity-seeking—evaluates online and offline retail channels when purchasing clothing. Their responses reveal that trust is shaped by perceptions of authenticity, reliability, consistency across channels, and product variety, all of which critically influence their omni-channel purchase decisions.

A strong level of trust emerges regarding the authenticity of clothing items delivered across channels. With 38% neutral and 32% agreeing, nearly 70% of Gen Z respondents do not doubt product genuineness irrespective of whether the purchase occurs online or in-store. This neutrality-leaning distribution suggests that authenticity is not a major concern. One fifth of the respondents express disagreement, showing that brand credibility largely safeguards the buying process. The quick adoption of product online is the starting point for every marketer of fashion product.

Trust in service responsiveness—both online and offline—is comparatively higher, with 31% neutral and 36% agreeing, indicating that 67% of respondents perceive customer service as dependable. This trust is critical for Gen Z shoppers, who expect seamless, quick, and error-free assistance across touchpoints. The 18% disagreement indicates still there are conservative respondents who belive in interaction act store level.

Regarding product consistency across channels, 32% neutrality and 22% agreement demonstrate that over 50% believe fashion products viewed online are largely similar when physically inspected in-store. Still, the disagreement by one fourth of total respondents in this regard implies that discrepancies in color, fit, or quality

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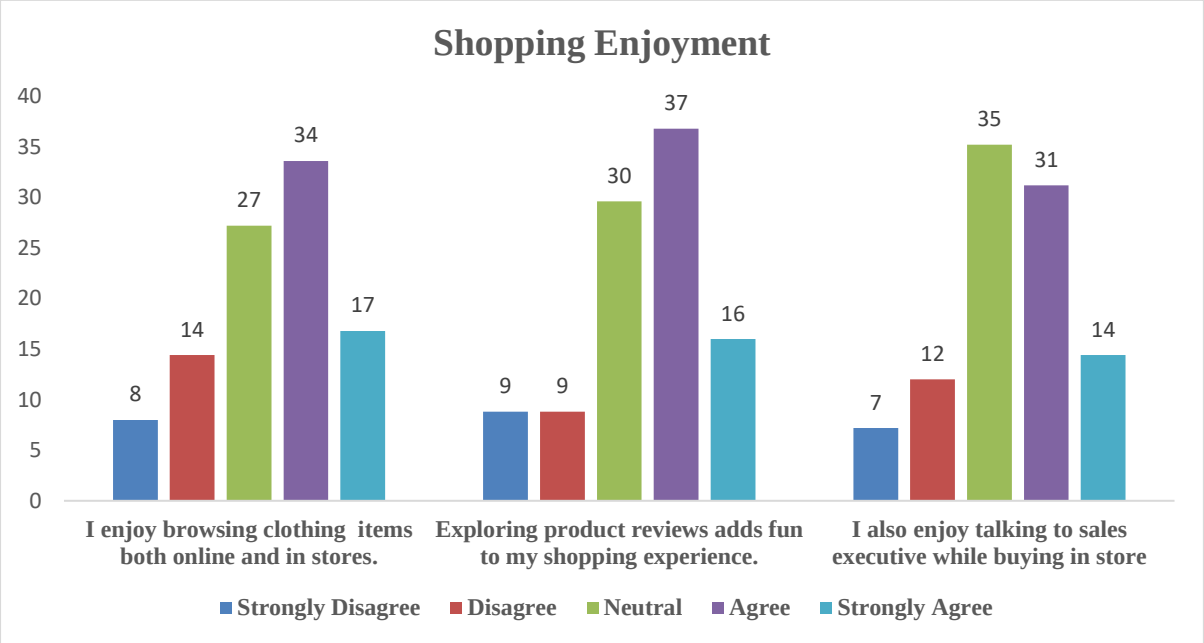
remain a pain point for many Gen Z buyers—a known friction in online clothing retail that can directly reduce trust and increase return rates.

A positive perception is also observed about the availability of similar product variety across channels, with 26% neutral and 33% agreement (total 59%). This reflects well on brands' ability to maintain assortment coherence, which is especially important for Gen Z consumers who frequently browse online but may complete purchases in-store, or vice versa. The 31% combined disagreement (14% strongly disagree; 17% disagree), however, suggests that some feel online platforms may either underrepresent or overrepresent stock compared to physical outlets.

Overall, the findings indicate that Gen Z consumers display moderate-to-strong trust in omni-channel clothing retail systems. Gen Z value consistency, expect authenticity, priorities service responsiveness, and demand uniformity in product variety across channels. Yet their responses—particularly the recurring pattern of high neutrality—reflect a cautious, evidence-based approach to trust formation.

Gen Z shoppers do not easily commit to trust; rather, they evaluate trust continuously through tangible experiences and cross-channel verification. Any deviations in product experience, service quality, or variety can leads to deviation to their loyalty.

Chart – 5
Influence of Shopping Enjoyment



A majority of Gen Z respondents express strong enjoyment in browsing clothing items both online and in stores. With 34% agreement, 27% neutrality, and 17% strong agreement, nearly 78% show a positive inclination toward multi-channel browsing.

This indicates that Gen Z perceives exploration across channels as engaging and effortless, driven by their comfort with digital interfaces and their simultaneous appreciation for in-store visual and tactile experiences. Only 22% show disagreement, suggesting that browsing is widely regarded as an enjoyable, low-risk activity.

Similarly, exploring product reviews adds considerable enjoyment to their shopping journey. With 37% agreement, 30% neutrality, and 16% strong agreement, around 83% find review-checking either enjoyable or at least useful. This behaviour reflects core Gen Z characteristics: they are information-intensive, peer-influenced, and validation-driven.

Reviews not only assist decision-making but also create a sense of participation and digital interaction, contributing to an enjoyable exploratory process. Minimal disagreement (18%) suggests reviews are an integral and accepted component of their digital shopping routine.

Interestingly, Gen Z also reports strong enjoyment in interacting with sales executives during in-store purchases. 35% neutrality, 31% agreement, and 14% strong agreement collectively show that 80% value human interaction to some degree, revealing that despite their digital fluency, Gen Z still appreciates personalised in-store engagement.

Hybrid preference illustrates the "phygital" nature of their shopping behaviour—an expectation of digital convenience blended with human reassurance. The relatively low disagreement levels (19%) reinforce that in-store interaction remains relevant, especially for clarifications, styling advice, or confidence-building before purchasing higher-value fashion items.

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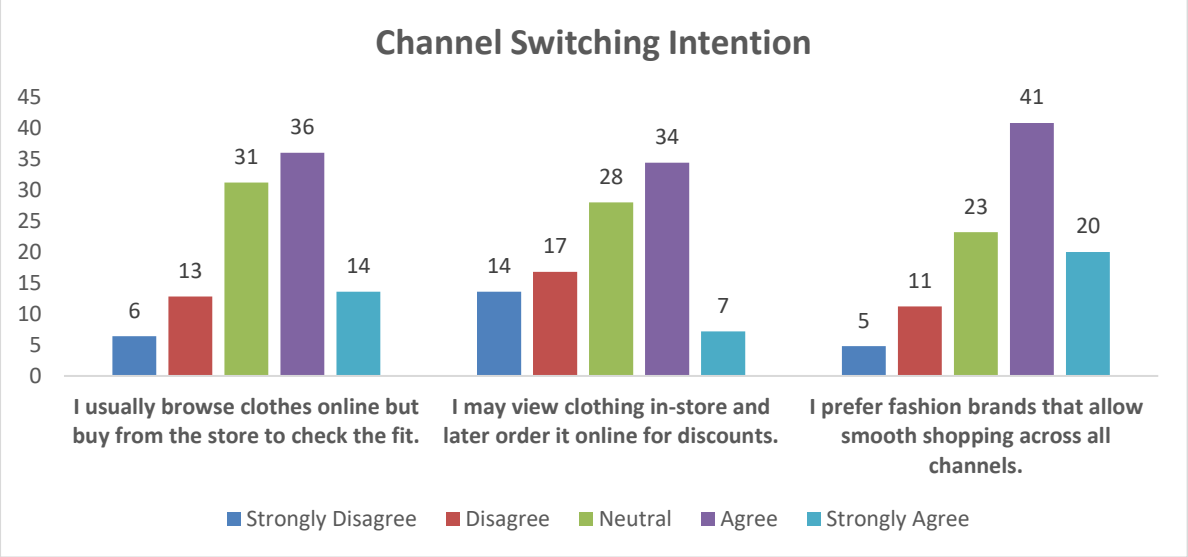
Overall, the chart demonstrates that shopping enjoyment is a powerful behavioral driver for Gen Z, rooted in their ability to fluidly navigate between digital and physical environments. Enjoyment for this cohort stems from a combination of digital discovery (online browsing, review exploration) and experiential touchpoints (in-store browsing, sales interactions). Their digital nativeness enhances the depth of exploration, while their appreciation for physical experience ensures that brick-and-mortar stores continue to hold experiential value.

Chart-6

Channel Switching Intention of Gen Z



A significant majority engages in the pattern of browsing online and buying from the store to verify fit and feel. With 31% neutrality, 36% agreement, and 14% strong agreement, nearly 81% of respondents show openness or preference for this online-to-offline shift. This suggests that while Gen Z values digital exploration for variety and convenience, they also place strong importance on tactile confirmation before purchasing clothing. Only one fifth express disagreement, indicating that for most, digital browsing is a low-risk stage, whereas physical stores serve as validation touchpoints.

Conversely, the reverse switching behaviour—viewing items in-store and purchasing online for discounts—is also prominent. Here, 28% neutrality and 34% agreement indicate that 62% are inclined toward this offline-to-online shift. This pattern is consistent with Gen Z's well-documented price sensitivity and their tendency to compare discounts, cashback offers, and platform benefits before making a final purchase. The 31% disagreement level (Combine Disagree and Strongly Disagree), however, suggests that a sizeable segment prefers to complete the purchase immediately in-store without deferring it to online channels. Thus, we can interpret that consumer's belive in "jo dikhta hai vohi sach" is strong for buying cloths.

The strongest indicator of Gen Z channel-switching intention is seen in their preference for brands that offer fully integrated, smooth cross-channel shopping experiences. With 23% neutral, 41% agreement, and 20% strong agreement, a striking 84% express a clear preference for seamless omni-channel ecosystems. This finding reflects Gen Z's expectation of frictionless transitions—whether they browse online, check stock availability, visit a store, redeem promotions, or complete the purchase online. Only a marginal **16%** hold opposing views.

Reliability and Validity:

H0: There is no significant internal consistency among the items measuring each construct of digital-native consumers' clothing buying behaviour.

H1: There is significant internal consistency among the items measuring each construct of digital-native consumers' clothing buying behaviour.

Interpretation: As KMO value is higher than 0.7 H0 rejected.

The KMO value is **0.928**, which falls in the "excellent" category as suggested by Kaiser's classification (Kaiser, 1974). This indicates that the variables share enough common variance to justify the use of factor analysis. In simple terms, the data are strongly suited for uncovering underlying dimensions or factors. This means the variables are sufficiently correlated and appropriate for factor extraction and further Factor Analysis- Principal Component Analysis.

Chi-Square:

To examine the influence of various demographic aspects of consumer on various buying approaches Chi-square test has been carried out.

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H0: There is no significant influence of Gender, Age Group, Education and Occupation of respondent on Frequency of Buying Cloths, Most Preferred Platform to Buying Cloths, Pre-buying Approach of Consumer
H1: There is significant influence of Gender, Age Group, Education and Occupation of respondent on Frequency of Buying Cloths, Most Preferred Platform to Buying Cloths, Pre-buying Approach of Consumer

Approach of Consumers	Gender	Age Group	Education	Occupation
Frequency of Buying Cloths in 3 Months	**0.054**	**0.016**	0.134	0.177
Most Preferred Platform to Buying Cloths	**0.00**	0.092	0.328	0.183
Pre-buying Approach of Consumer	**0.023**	0.098	0.180	0.281

Interpretation:
H0 is rejected for significant influence of Gender **for** Frequency of Buying Cloths, Most Preferred Platform to Buying Cloths, Pre-buying Approach of Consumer as the chi-square value is less than 0.05
H0 is rejected for significant influence of Age group for Frequency of Buying cloths in last 3 Months for Age Group.
H0 is accepted for Education and Occupation to Frequency of Buying Cloths, Most Preferred Platform to Buying Cloths, Pre-buying Approach of Consumer as the chi-square value is higher than 0.05.
Thus, we can conclude that Frequency of Buying Cloths, Most Preferred Platform to Buying Cloths, Pre-buying Approach of Consumer **is significantly influenced by Gender of the consumers. Over and above** Frequency of Buying Cloths is also influenced by Age Group of Consumers.
Anova:
The ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether consumers from different income groups differ significantly in their approach towards (Cloths Purchase Frequency, Preference of Platform for searching information and Pre buying Activities)
Hypotheses
Clothing Purchase Frequency
H0: There is no significant difference in clothing purchase frequency across the groups.
H1: There is significant difference in clothing purchase frequency across the different income groups.

H0: There is no significant difference in most preferred platform to buy cloths across the different income groups.
H1: There is significant difference in most preferred platform to buy cloths across the different income groups.

H0: There is no significant difference in prebuying approach to buy cloths across the different income groups.
H1: There is significant difference in prebuying approach to buy cloths across the different income groups.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How Many times in a 3 Months do you buy clothes?	Between Groups	44.901	5	8.980	12.241	.000
	Within Groups	179.003	244	.734		
	Total	223.904	249			
Most Preferred Platform to buy Cloths	Between Groups	3.751	5	.750	1.290	.269
	Within Groups	141.849	244	.581		
	Total	145.600	249			
Pre Buying Approach	Between Groups	.653	5	.131	.764	.576
	Within Groups	41.683	244	.171		
	Total	42.336	249			

Interpretation
1. Frequency of Buying Cloths.
The ANOVA shows a significant difference (F = 12.241, p = .000). Since the p-value is below 0.05, H0 is rejected. In simple terms, purchase frequency varies significantly across different income groups of respondents.
2. Most Preferred Platform to Buy Clothes
There is a significant difference in preferred shopping platform across the groups.
Interpretation. Results show F = 1.290, p = .269, which is above the 0.05 threshold.
Thus, H0 is accepted. The respondents show similar platform preferences for clothing purchases amongst different income group.
3. Pre-Buying Approach
The ANOVA result (F = 0.764, p = .576) shows no significant variation as P value is 0.576 which is higher than threshold value of 0.05. Hence, we can conclude that there is no difference in pre-purchase behaviour of consumers of different income group. More or less all income groups are searching for information, comparing products, or reading reviews similarly.

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OVERALL SUMMARY

- A significant difference was found only in clothing purchase frequency.
- Platform preference and pre-buying approach did not show significant differences across groups.
- These results suggest that while shopping intensity varies among respondents, their choice of platform and pre-buying behaviour remain largely uniform.

Principal Component Analysis:
H0: The observed variables do not group together into distinct and interpretable constructs representing omni-channel clothing buying behaviour.
H1: The observed variables group together into distinct and interpretable constructs representing omni-channel clothing buying behaviour.

Component Matrix						
Different Consumer Behaviour Aspects	Raw			Rescaled		
	Component			Component		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
It is convenient to check clothing availability both online and in stores.	.787	-.219	.240	.701	-.195	.213
I find it easy to locate and purchase fashion items across multiple platforms.	.745	-.063	.367	.677	-.057	.333
Switching between online and in-store channels saves my time and effort.	.843	-.058	.466	.717	-.049	.397
Generally, I check cloths online and Buy only if it's of higher value	.752	.498	.721	.563	.372	.539
The brand provides consistent information about products online and in-store.	.871	.099	-.239	.759	.086	-.208
I can easily return or exchange items purchased online at the brand's physical store.	.755	.238	-.077	.651	.206	-.067
I get similar promotions and discounts across both channels.	.598	.685	-.190	.521	.597	-.166
Policy for Buying Online and Offline for Guarantee remains same	.734	.557	-.096	.650	.493	-.085
I am comfortable using mobile apps for personal-care purchases.	.847	-.168	-.125	.743	-.147	-.109
I feel confident making payments through digital modes (UPI, wallets, etc.).	1.038	-.249	-.250	.808	-.194	-.194
Now a days every Marketer is Accepting Online Payment	.868	-.369	-.222	.732	-.311	-.188
I feel safe while making Payment through UPI	.881	-.263	-.190	.775	-.232	-.168
I believe the brand delivers authentic clothing items regardless of the channel.	.861	-.078	-.143	.810	-.073	-.134
I find both the website and store staff reliable and responsive.	.846	-.031	.009	.809	-.030	.008
I found no difference in fashion Product seen online and seen at instore	.763	.501	-.214	.673	.442	-.189
I found similar Variety of Cloths online and Offline	.834	.262	-.470	.684	.215	-.386
I enjoy browsing clothing items both online and in stores.	.943	-.309	-.007	.814	-.266	-.006
Exploring product reviews adds fun to my shopping experience.	.839	-.219	.086	.743	-.194	.076
I also enjoy talking to sales executive while buying in store	.713	-.196	.057	.654	-.180	.053
I usually browse clothes online but buy from the store to check the fit.	.749	-.117	-.055	.698	-.109	-.051
I may view clothing in-store and later order it online for discounts.	.761	.246	.263	.656	.212	.226
I prefer fashion brands that allow smooth shopping across all channels.	.785	-.295	.234	.730	-.274	.218

PCA results show that Gen Z consumers' fashion buying behaviour can be summarized into **three meaningful components**:

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Component 1: Omni-channel Convenience and Trust: Strong comfort with digital payments, browsing, consistency, and reliability.
Component 2: Channel Consistency and Policy Alignment: Sensitivity to uniformity across online and offline shopping experiences.
Component 3: Cross-Channel Switching Behaviour: Behavioral patterns of browsing in one channel and purchasing in another, often influenced by offers and product fit.
Interpretation of the Component Matrix
PCA extracted **three components**, and the factor loadings show how strongly each statement is associated with each component. Component 1 often captures the strongest common variance among all items. Components 2 and 3 reflect additional but smaller underlying patterns.

1. Component 1: Core Omni-Channel Convenience & Trust
Most items have **strong positive loadings on Component 1** (around 0.70–0.82), indicating that this component represents a broad, dominant pattern in the data. These items relate to:
Themes Represented
- Convenience of switching between online and offline
- Payment comfort and digital readiness
- Confidence and trust in brand information
- Similarity in product quality, promotions, and policy
- Enjoyment of browsing across channels
- Assurance of authenticity

Interpretation
Component 1 reflects **"Overall Omni-Channel Confidence and Convenience"** among digital-native consumers. This means Gen Z respondents strongly associate their clothing-buying behaviour with seamless switching, trustworthy product information, and comfort in digital payments.
2. Component 2: Policy and Promotion Consistency
Component 2 shows moderate loadings for items such as:
- "I get similar promotions and discounts across both channels." (0.627)
- "Policy for buying online and offline for guarantee remains same." (0.520)
- "I found no difference in fashion product seen online and in-store." (0.472)

Interpretation
Component 2 appears to reflect **"Channel Consistency and Policy Assurance."**
Gen Z considers following aspects for Components
- Consistency in pricing, discounts, and promotions by marketers
- Uniformity in policies across online and offline
- Perceived uniformity of product characteristics across channels

Gen Z values uniform treatment—same deals, same guarantees, same product quality—regardless of whether the purchase occurs online or in-store.
3. Interpretation of Component 3: Channel Switching Behaviour
Component 3 shows higher loadings on statements related to online-to-offline (O2O) and offline-to-online (O2O) switching behaviours, such as:
- "I find it easy to locate and purchase fashion items across multiple platforms." (0.421)
- "I may view clothing in-store and later order it online for discounts." (0.313)
- "Generally, I check clothes online and buy online if higher value." (0.433)

Themes Represented
- Browsing online but buying offline
- Checking offline and ordering online
- Price-driven switching between channels

Component 3 captures **"Cross-Channel Shopping Behaviour"** — the strategic movement between browsing and purchasing channels based on convenience, price, or product evaluation.
Hence H1 is acceptable for above.

FINDINGS

1. Gen Z shoppers show a strong preference for omni-channel convenience, finding it easy to browse, locate, and purchase clothing across both online and offline platforms.
2. Checking product availability across channels has become a standard expectation, indicating that unified inventory visibility is essential in apparel retail.
3. Smooth movement between digital and physical touchpoints enhances perceived efficiency, reinforcing Gen Z's preference for flexible and time-saving shopping options.

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4. High-quality channel integration—consistent information, uniform branding, and standardized service policies—significantly boosts Gen Z's confidence in omni-channel systems.
5. Gaps in promotional consistency and guarantee policies create dissatisfaction, reducing trust and limiting willingness to engage across multiple channels.
6. Gen Z shows strong digital readiness, with high comfort in using mobile applications, digital wallets, UPI, and online payment methods.
7. Belief in the safety of digital payment systems strengthens online purchase intentions, as secure UPI systems reduce perceived financial risk.
8. Gen Z expresses moderate-to-strong trust in omni-channel retail formats, particularly when brands provide authenticity, responsiveness, and reliable product quality.
9. High neutrality in trust-related responses suggests a cautious, experience-driven trust formation process, where reliability must be proven over time.
10. Shopping enjoyment strongly influences purchasing, supported by both digital exploration (reviews, browsing) and the sensory experience of physical stores.
11. Online product reviews enhance decision certainty, demonstrating Gen Z's reliance on peer opinions and information-rich evaluations.
12. Sales staff interactions remain meaningful, with personal guidance improving in-store satisfaction even among digitally confident shoppers.
13. Gen Z frequently switches channels based on where they perceive maximum value—online for comparison and offline for product verification.
14. Their preference for frictionless cross-channel movement highlights the need for synchronized inventories, consistent pricing, and integrated support systems.
15. Channel switching for Gen Z reflects strategic and informed behaviour rather than brand disloyalty, emphasizing their expectation of a fully connected retail ecosystem.
16. Gen Z consumers are using platforms interchangeably. There is no certain norm for such pattern.
17. Principal Component analysis indicates that buying behaviour of Gen Z is strongly shaped by convenience, reliable digital interactions, and consistent product information across channels. A smooth and dependable online–offline journey significantly enhances their purchase intention.
18. It has been observed that Gen Z frequently browse in one channel and purchase in another, driven by offers, better pricing, and product evaluation needs. This cross-channel switching reflects their strategic and digitally confident shopping style.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Better the robust omni-channel integration, quicker the ensuring availability of information about product like pricing, and inventory visibility remain uniform across platforms. Since Gen Z considers cross-channel consistency as basic hygiene, brands that fail to provide it risk losing credibility and engagement.
- Investment in seamless digital navigation and user-friendly interfaces is essential for consumer engagement and quick adoption of clothing brand. Enhancing mobile app performance, simplifying product search options, and enabling smooth transitions between online and in-store experiences will strengthen convenience-driven behaviour.
- Retailers should develop reliable promotional and guarantee policies that remain identical across channels. Such initiative can bring trust a, confidence and transparency amongst Gen Z consumers. Eliminating discrepancies in discounts, exchange rules, or warranty claims can substantially improve trust and reduce friction in the shopping journey.
- Proper enhancement of digital payment security and promote the safety of UPI and wallet-based transactions. Clear communication on secure payment protocols will reinforce Gen Z's confidence in completing purchases online. Digital evidence of payment, movement of ordered goods and intimation of delivery of goods are expected by Gen Z consumers.
- Actual store experience is playing significant role in case of Gen Z consumer's buying decision. Hence, every retailer needs to consider their store as "experience center".
- Experiential retail should be strengthened by combining sensory engagement with meaningful human interaction. Well-trained store staff, personalised assistance, and experiential displays can elevate enjoyment and drive in-store conversions. Store layout needs to be changed over period of time to make consumer experience novel and engaging for long period of time.
- User-generated content is generally unbiased and organic. Hence, its trust worth too. Retailers should utilize such in the form of integrating reviews, ratings, and peer recommendations within both digital and physical channels. Since reviews shape Gen Z's confidence, making them more accessible will support informed decision-making.
- Effortless channel switching is key for success in the market for every brand. Hence, retailers need to put appropriate emphasis on such.

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CONCLUSION:

The highly tech-savvy nature of Indian Gen Z consumers in the apparel category reveals a critical dichotomy: while online platforms offer unparalleled ease of information and promotional comparison, digital presence alone has yet to fully solidify brand trust, leading to frequent **omni-channel switching behavior**. This fluid consumer journey, characterized by constant interchange between searching online and buying offline (and vice-versa), mandates that apparel marketers maintain exceptional digital agility to attract this growing economic force. Crucially, fostering purchase confidence requires retailers to move beyond simple interface design by ensuring transparency and reliability, particularly through secure payment mechanisms. Therefore, for clothing retailers to successfully convert and retain this cohort, the strategic focus must consolidate around three pillars: delivering seamless convenience, actively building trust through operational integrity, and ensuring complete alignment of policies across all offline and online touchpoints.

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FINANCIAL LITERACY AND HEALTH RESPONSIBILITY: HOW ECONOMIC AWARENESS INFLUENCES ENDOCRINE TREATMENT ADHERENCE IN TRANSGENDER GEN Z

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between financial literacy, financial challenges, and health responsibility among transgender Gen Z youths undergoing gender-affirming endocrine care in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Although gender-affirming hormone therapy is essential for improving psychological well-being and reducing gender dysphoria, many transgender youths face economic instability, irregular income, and limited financial guidance. The purpose of this study is to examine how financial literacy and economic challenges influence treatment adherence and mental health outcomes, and to identify financial factors that promote responsible health behaviour. A structured questionnaire was administered to 28 transgender Gen Z respondents aged 18–26. The instrument measured financial literacy, financial challenges, endocrine treatment adherence, and psychological well-being using PHQ-9 and GAD-7 scales. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank correlation.
The results show a significant positive relationship between financial literacy and treatment adherence ($\rho = 0.449$, $p = 0.016$), indicating that youths with better financial planning skills maintain more consistent hormone therapy. However, financial challenges did not significantly affect adherence ($\rho = -0.083$, $p = 0.676$), suggesting that many respondents continued treatment despite economic strain. Similarly, financial challenges showed negative but non-significant relationships with depression ($\rho = -0.365$, $p = 0.056$) and anxiety ($\rho = -0.260$, $p = 0.182$). The study concludes that financial literacy plays a more influential role than financial hardship in shaping responsible health behaviour. Strengthening financial education and providing targeted economic support may improve health autonomy, treatment continuity, and psychological well-being among transgender Gen Z youths.

Keywords: *Financial Literacy, Transgender Gen Z, Endocrine Care, Treatment Adherence, Psychological Well-being*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Gen Z youths in India are entering adulthood in a period marked by rapid social change, digital expansion, and increasing visibility of gender-diverse identities. Among them, transgender Gen Z individuals face unique challenges, particularly in accessing gender-affirming endocrine care that is essential for their mental health, identity development, and long-term well-being. In urban regions such as Chennai, Tamil Nadu—known for its diverse culture, strong healthcare infrastructure, and active LGBTQIA+ support networks—many transgender youths still experience economic vulnerability, unstable incomes, and limited financial guidance. These factors play a crucial role in determining how consistently they can follow their hormone-related treatment plans.
Endocrine interventions require long-term financial planning for medical consultations, hormone medications, laboratory tests, digital healthcare expenses, and psychological support. For transgender Gen Z youths, who often face family rejection, early school dropout, discrimination in employment, or limited financial resources, the ability to manage these expenses effectively becomes a question of both financial literacy and health responsibility. Financial awareness influences their decisions about budgeting, saving, and prioritising healthcare, which in turn affects treatment adherence.
This study focuses on 28 transgender Gen Z respondents from Chennai to explore how financial literacy shapes their endocrine-care behaviours. Chennai provides a relevant context due to its mix of urban opportunities and persistent socioeconomic inequalities. By examining the connection between financial knowledge and responsible health practices, the study aims to highlight the importance of economic empowerment for improving health autonomy, treatment continuity, and overall well-being among transgender Gen Z youths.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Financial literacy and health responsibility have become increasingly important research areas as young people navigate complex economic systems and rising healthcare costs. According to Lusardi and Mitchell (2014), financial literacy enables individuals to make informed decisions about budgeting, saving, and long-term

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planning. For Gen Z youths, financial understanding is linked to independence, digital engagement, and responsible citizenship. However, marginalized groups—including transgender youths—often have limited exposure to financial education, which contributes to economic vulnerability (OECD, 2021).

Transgender individuals face unique economic and social challenges that affect their access to healthcare. The U.S. Transgender Survey reported high levels of unemployment, poverty, and financial instability among transgender people, which significantly obstruct access to gender-affirming medical treatment (James et al., 2016). In India, despite increasing visibility and legal recognition, transgender youths continue to face discrimination in education, housing, and employment, limiting their income opportunities and financial autonomy (Human Rights Watch, 2020). These socioeconomic inequalities increase the financial pressure associated with long-term medical care.

Gender-affirming endocrine interventions—such as hormone therapy and related laboratory monitoring—are essential for improving psychological well-being and reducing gender dysphoria (Olson-Kennedy et al., 2019). Studies consistently show that timely and consistent endocrine care leads to reduced depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among transgender youths (Tordoff et al., 2022). However, adherence to such treatments depends on financial capacity, awareness of costs, and ability to manage medical expenses. Low financial literacy has been linked to poor adherence, inconsistent medication usage, and reliance on unsafe or unregulated sources (Wylie et al., 2016).

Digital healthcare is another key factor influencing transgender youths' care experiences. Telemedicine expands access to endocrinologists and mental-health professionals, especially in urban areas like Chennai. Yet digital divide issues—such as inadequate device access, unaffordable data, and low digital literacy—limit the benefits of telehealth for economically disadvantaged transgender youths (van Dijk, 2020). Financial literacy helps youths navigate digital healthcare platforms responsibly, compare service costs, and avoid misinformation.

Studies integrating finance and transgender health emphasize that financial empowerment improves health autonomy. Reisner et al. (2016) found that transgender individuals with better financial stability demonstrate higher treatment adherence and improved mental health. Similarly, Kattari et al. (2020) showed that economic support and financial education enhance access to gender-affirming services. These findings support the idea that financial literacy is not only an economic skill but a health-promoting factor.

Overall, existing literature reveals a clear connection between financial literacy, economic stability, and treatment adherence among transgender individuals. However, limited research focuses specifically on Gen Z transgender youths in Indian urban contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining how financial literacy shapes endocrine treatment adherence among 28 transgender Gen Z youths in Chennai.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1) To assess the level of financial literacy among transgender Gen Z youths in Chennai.
2) To examine the financial challenges faced by transgender youths in accessing and maintaining gender-affirming endocrine care.
3) To analyse how financial literacy influences treatment adherence and responsible health behaviour.
4) To explore the relationship between economic stability and psychological well-being among transgender Gen Z participants.
5) To identify which financial-literacy components (budgeting, saving, cost planning, decision-making) most strongly affect endocrine-care continuity.
6) To provide suggestions for improving financial empowerment and health responsibility among transgender youths in Chennai.

4. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between financial literacy and endocrine treatment adherence among transgender Gen Z youths in Chennai.
H_{02}: Financial challenges have no significant effect on health responsibility or treatment continuity.
H_{03}: Economic stability does not significantly influence the psychological well-being of transgender youths.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

(I) Research Design: The study adopts a descriptive and correlational research design. It aims to describe the level of financial literacy among transgender Gen Z youths in Chennai and examine the relationship between financial literacy, financial challenges, and adherence to gender-affirming endocrine care. A quantitative approach is used to collect and analyse numerical data, supported by a few short open-ended questions to understand personal experiences.

(II) Population and Sample: The target population includes transgender Gen Z youths living in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

- **Sample size:** 28 respondents
- **Age group:** 18–26 years (Gen Z)
- **Gender identity:** Any transgender or gender-diverse identity

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- **Sampling technique:** Purposive sampling with snowball support, as the population is specific and hard to reach
- **Inclusion criteria:**
  - Aged 18–26
  - Self-identified as transgender
  - Resident of Chennai
  - Currently receiving or seeking gender-affirming endocrine care

(III) Data Collection Instrument: A structured questionnaire is used as the main data collection tool. It consists of four sections:

1. Demographic profile (age, education, income, employment, living status)
2. Financial literacy scale (budgeting, saving, planning, understanding costs)
3. Endocrine treatment adherence scale (regularity of hormone use, follow-up visits, interruptions due to cost)
4. Financial challenges (out-of-pocket medical expenditure, digital healthcare costs, insurance gaps)
5. Psychological well-being (short PHQ-9 and GAD-7 items for stress and anxiety)

Most questions use a 5-point Likert scale, along with binary and checklist items.

(IV) Operational Definitions of Variables:

- **Financial Literacy:** Composite score measuring budgeting skills, financial planning, and ability to manage healthcare-related expenses.
- **Financial Challenges:** Extent of economic hardship faced while accessing endocrine care, including medication costs, consultation fees, and digital expenses.
- **Treatment Adherence:** Regularity and continuity of hormone use, follow-up consultations, and avoidance of unsafe practices.
- **Gen Z:** Individuals aged between 18–26 years.
- **Endocrine Care:** Gender-affirming hormone therapy and related medical monitoring.

(V) Limitations of the Study:

- Small sample size limits generalization
- Self-reported data may involve bias
- Purposive sampling reduces representativeness
- Financial information may be sensitive and underreported

6. TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS:

H_{01}: There is *no significant relationship* between financial literacy and endocrine treatment adherence among transgender Gen Z youths in Chennai.

H_{11}: There is a *significant positive relationship* between financial literacy and endocrine treatment adherence.

As shown in table 1, a Spearman's rank correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between financial literacy and endocrine treatment adherence among transgender Gen Z youths in Chennai (N = 28). The results show a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between financial literacy and treatment adherence ($\rho = 0.449$, $p = 0.016$). Therefore, H_{01} is rejected, indicating that higher financial literacy is associated with better treatment adherence.

Table 1: Spearman's Rank Correlation Between Financial Literacy and Treatment Adherence (N = 28)

Variables	Spearman's ρ	p-value	Decision
Financial Literacy (FL) Score & Treatment Adherence (TA) Score	0.449	0.016	Reject H_{01}

Source: Based on calculations

The findings suggest that transgender youths with better budgeting skills, cost planning, and financial awareness are more consistent in following their hormone therapy schedules. Financial literacy plays a meaningful role in promoting responsible health behaviour and continuity of endocrine care.

H_{02}: There is *no significant relationship* between financial challenges and treatment adherence among transgender Gen Z youths.

H_{12}: There is *significant relationship* between financial challenges and treatment adherence among transgender Gen Z youths.

As shown in table 2, a Spearman's rank correlation was used to analyse the relationship between financial challenges and endocrine treatment adherence among transgender Gen Z youths in Chennai (N = 28). The results showed a very weak and non-significant negative correlation ($\rho = -0.083$, $p = 0.676$). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, H_{02} could not be rejected. This indicates that, within this sample, financial challenges do not significantly influence treatment adherence.

Table 2: Spearman's Rank Correlation Between Financial Challenges and Treatment Adherence (N = 28)

Variables	Spearman's ρ	p-value	Decision
Financial Challenges (FC) & Treatment Adherence (TA)	–0.083	0.676	Fail to Reject H_{02}

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Although higher financial challenges showed a slight trend toward lower adherence, the relationship is not statistically meaningful. This suggests that other factors—such as community support, personal motivation, or access to digital healthcare—may play a larger role in adherence than financial difficulty alone.

H_{03}: *Economic stability does not significantly influence the psychological well-being of transgender Gen Z youths.*

H_{13}: *Economic stability significantly improves psychological well-being.*

As shown in table 3, a Spearman's rank correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether economic stability influenced psychological well-being among transgender Gen Z youths in Chennai (N = 28). Economic stability was measured using the Financial Challenges (FC) Score, while psychological well-being was evaluated through PHQ-9 and GAD-7 scores. The correlation between FC and PHQ-9 was negative but not statistically significant (ρ = –0.365, p = 0.056). Similarly, the correlation between FC and GAD-7 was weak and non-significant (ρ = –0.260, p = 0.182).

Therefore, H_{03} could not be rejected, indicating that economic stability did not significantly predict psychological well-being in this sample.

Table 3: Spearman's Correlation Between Financial Challenges and Psychological Well-Being (N = 28)

Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	Spearman's ρ	p-value	Decision
Financial Challenges (FC)	PHQ-9 (Depression)	–0.365	0.056	Fail to Reject H_{03}
Financial Challenges (FC)	GAD-7 (Anxiety)	–0.260	0.182	Fail to Reject H_{03}

While financial stability tends to improve mental well-being, the relationship is not statistically significant in this study. Other factors—such as community support, social acceptance, and emotional resilience—may play a larger role in the mental health of transgender Gen Z youths.

Table 4: Combined Results Table for All Hypotheses (Spearman's Rank Correlation, N = 28)

Hypothesis	Variables Tested	Spearman's ρ	p-value	Direction	Decision
H_1	Financial Literacy (FL) Score ↔ Treatment Adherence (TA) Score	**0.449**	**0.016**	Positive	**Reject H_{01}**
H_2	Financial Challenges (FC) Score ↔ Treatment Adherence (TA) Score	**–0.083**	**0.676**	Negative	**Fail to Reject H_{02}**
H_3(a)	Financial Challenges (FC) Score ↔ PHQ-9 (Depression)	**–0.365**	**0.056**	Negative	**Fail to Reject H_{03}**
H_3(b)	Financial Challenges (FC) Score ↔ GAD-7 (Anxiety)	**–0.260**	**0.182**	Negative	**Fail to Reject H_{03}**

A significant and positive relationship was found between financial literacy and treatment adherence (ρ = 0.449, p = 0.016), leading to the rejection of H_{01}. However, financial challenges did not show a significant relationship with treatment adherence (ρ = –0.083, p = 0.676), resulting in the retention of H_{02}. Similarly, economic stability did not significantly influence psychological well-being, with non-significant correlations found for both PHQ-9 (ρ = –0.365, p = 0.056) and GAD-7 (ρ = –0.260, p = 0.182), leading to the retention of H_{03}. Overall, the results suggest that financial literacy plays a more direct role in endocrine treatment adherence, whereas financial challenges alone do not significantly predict adherence or psychological outcomes.

7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

The analysis of the study offers important insights into how financial factors influence health responsibility and psychological well-being among transgender Gen Z youths undergoing gender-affirming endocrine care in Chennai. The findings indicate that financial literacy plays a significant role in shaping treatment adherence, while financial challenges, although relevant, do not show a statistically significant impact on adherence or mental health indicators in this specific sample.

I. Financial Literacy and Treatment Adherence (H_1): The results show a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation between financial literacy and treatment adherence (ρ = 0.449, p = 0.016). This indicates that transgender youths with stronger financial planning skills, budgeting knowledge, and awareness of medical costs are more likely to maintain regular hormone therapy, attend follow-up consultations, and avoid treatment interruptions.

This finding is consistent with existing literature, which suggests that financial literacy enhances decision-making, promotes responsible health behaviour, and reduces the likelihood of risky or inconsistent care (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). In the context of transgender health, financial literacy can empower individuals to anticipate monthly treatment costs, allocate resources, and prioritise essential healthcare needs.

For transgender Gen Z youths—many of whom face unstable employment, lack of family support, or discrimination—the ability to plan finances becomes a critical protective factor. The positive relationship found in the study supports the idea that financial literacy should be integrated into transgender community programs and healthcare counselling to improve treatment outcomes.

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II. Financial Challenges and Treatment Adherence (H_2): In contrast to expectations, the study found no significant relationship between financial challenges and treatment adherence ($\rho = -0.083$, $p = 0.676$). Although the direction was negative, indicating that more financial strain tends to reduce adherence, the effect was too small and statistically insignificant.

There are several possible explanations:

a). Community support systems: In Chennai, many transgender youths access community-based networks that offer financial assistance, subsidised services, and peer support. These may help individuals continue treatment despite economic hardship.

b). Strong intrinsic motivation for gender-affirming care: For many transgender youths, hormone therapy is deeply connected to identity, self-esteem, and emotional comfort. Even when facing financial challenges, participants may prioritise treatment above other expenses, showing resilience and determination.

c). Small sample size: With N = 28, the statistical power is limited. Subtle relationships may exist but may not reach significance in a small sample.

III. Temporary interruptions not captured strongly: Some respondents may rely on informal, low-cost, or even unsafe sources of hormones during financial stress. Although this keeps adherence numerically intact, it introduces medical risk not captured by the adherence score. Overall, the findings suggest that financial hardship alone does not automatically lead to treatment discontinuation among this group.

IV. Economic Stability and Psychological Well-Being (H_3): The relationship between financial challenges and psychological well-being was negative but not statistically significant for both PHQ-9 ($\rho = -0.365$, $p = 0.056$) and GAD-7 ($\rho = -0.260$, $p = 0.182$). This means that youths with greater financial stability tended to report better mental health, but the relationship was not strong enough to be statistically significant.

The marginal significance for PHQ-9 ($p = 0.056$) suggests a trend that aligns with existing research: financial stress often contributes to anxiety, depression, and emotional burden among transgender populations. However, again, the sample size may have limited the ability to detect significant effects. Other factors may be more influential than money in shaping mental health for this group, such as:

- social acceptance or stigma
- emotional support from peers
- access to identity-affirming spaces
- experiences with discrimination
- family rejection
- digital access to mental-health support

The finding suggests that while financial stability may influence well-being, it is only one piece of a larger psychosocial puzzle.

V. Integrating Findings with Broader Context: The study shows that knowledge matters more than the amount of money a person has. Financial literacy—knowing how to manage money—has a stronger connection to health responsibility than financial challenges themselves.

This supports the idea that empowering transgender Gen Z youths with financial skills, budgeting tools, and information about healthcare costs may improve adherence more effectively than focusing only on economic assistance. The insignificant results for financial challenges and mental health suggest that emotional resilience, community belongingness, and access to supportive networks may act as buffers against financial stress.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

(a) For healthcare providers

- Integrate financial guidance into endocrine counselling.
- Provide clear cost breakdowns of treatment plans.

(b) For policymakers

- Support financial literacy programmes for transgender youths.
- Offer insurance coverage or subsidies for gender-affirming care.

(C) For NGOs and community groups

- Strengthen peer support and financial mentoring.
- Provide emergency financial assistance for treatment continuity.

9. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY:

This study examined the role of financial literacy, financial challenges, and economic stability in shaping treatment adherence and psychological well-being among transgender Gen Z youths undergoing gender-affirming endocrine care in Chennai. Using data from 28 respondents, the findings highlight that financial literacy is a significant factor influencing health responsibility. Participants who demonstrated better budgeting skills, cost planning, and financial awareness were more consistent in adhering to their hormone therapy schedules. This underscores the importance of financial knowledge as a key enabler of treatment continuity, especially for transgender youths who often face social and economic marginalization.

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In contrast, financial challenges—although common within the sample—did not show a statistically significant relationship with treatment adherence or mental health outcomes. This suggests that transgender youths may prioritise hormone therapy even during periods of financial strain, driven by strong personal motivation or supported by community networks. Similarly, economic stability did not significantly predict psychological well-being, although negative correlations indicate a possible trend where greater financial security is associated with lower depression and anxiety. These findings imply that psychosocial factors such as peer support, emotional resilience, and community belonging may play a more crucial role in mental health than financial status alone.

Overall, the study emphasises that empowering transgender Gen Z youths with financial literacy can enhance their health autonomy and treatment adherence. Policymakers, healthcare providers, and community organisations must collaborate to integrate financial education, expand access to gender-affirming care, and strengthen social support systems. Such efforts can contribute to improved well-being, responsible health behaviours, and greater equity for transgender youths.

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RESEARCH ORIENTATION AND DATA LITERACY AMONG GEN Z COMMERCE STUDENTS (A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW)

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Abstract

Higher education's learning methods and skill needs have changed as a result of the quick development of digital technologies and the emergence of Generation Z, particularly in the fields of business and commerce. To investigate the association between research orientation and data literacy among Gen Z commerce students, this study performs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 standards. 12 peer reviewed studies that met the inclusion requirements were found through a systematic search of the Scopus database for the years 2020 to 2025.

According to the reviewed literature, Gen Z learners have a high preference for digital platforms, fintech, artificial intelligence, and virtual learning tools since these technologies improve their engagement and data-handling skills. However, due to disparities in curriculum design, pedagogical assistance, and technology availability, discrepancies in their research abilities and analytical thinking still exist. The main issues noted are a lack of training in critical inquiry, an excessive reliance on technology, and moral dilemmas with AI-powered teaching resources.

This evaluation emphasizes the want for incorporated pedagogical fashions that combine virtual literacy with conventional research skills to foster analytical thinking, innovation, and accountable virtual behavior among Gen Z inexperienced persons. The findings make a contribution to the broader discourse on 21st century education by means of highlighting the need for trade educators and policymakers to realign curricula toward facts-knowledgeable, studies-orientated learning. Overall, this observe gives precious insights into improving academic preparedness and employability among Gen Z commerce students in an increasingly facts-pushed international.

Keywords: *Gen Z, Research orientation, Data literacy, Digital literacy, Commerce education, Higher education, AI in learning, Research skills, and Digital natives.*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is experiencing one of the most significant periods of change in its history. Advancements in digital technology, widespread internet access, and the rise of artificial intelligence have reshaped how knowledge is created, delivered, and consumed. At the center of this transformation stands Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010), often described as the first generation of true digital natives. Unlike previous cohorts, Gen Z has grown up in an environment where smartphones, social media, online learning platforms, and real-time information flow are part of everyday life. This continuous exposure does not simply influence their communication styles it fundamentally shapes how they learn, process information, and solve problems.

Within commerce and business education, these shifts are particularly visible. Gen Z students tend to prefer interactive learning environments, practical digital tools, and flexible, technology-enabled pedagogies. Their comfort with multitasking, rapid information search, and digital collaboration sets them apart from older learners. However, this technological familiarity does not automatically translate into strong research or analytical capabilities. Instead, it highlights the growing need to understand the deeper competencies required for success in an increasingly data-driven world.

Two of the most critical competencies for modern commerce students are research orientation and data literacy. Research orientation reflects a learner's inclination and ability to engage in systematic inquiry questioning assumptions, applying analytical frameworks, and seeking evidence before forming conclusions. Data literacy, on the other hand, involves the ability to find, interpret, evaluate, and apply data in both academic and professional contexts. Together, these skills help students navigate complex business environments, make informed decisions, and contribute meaningfully to knowledge creation.

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Despite the growing attention on Gen Z's technological habits, the existing body of literature often remains fragmented. Many studies explore isolated aspects such as technology acceptance, AI usage, digital device dependency, or social media behavior. However, far fewer examine how these technological behaviors interact with the development of research skills and data literacy skills that are indispensable in fields like finance, accounting, management, and entrepreneurship.

This gap highlights the need for a structured synthesis. Therefore, this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) examines peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025 to bring together insights on Gen Z's digital engagement, research behaviors, and data competencies. The aim is to uncover emerging patterns, identify challenges, and offer evidence-based implications that can guide educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in building future-ready learning environments.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The central purpose of this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is to bring together and critically examine the existing body of research that explores how research orientation and data literacy develop among Generation Z commerce students in higher education. As digital technologies increasingly shape the way learners think, study, and interact with information, understanding these competencies becomes essential for preparing students for modern business environments.

More specifically, this review seeks to achieve the following:

- Identify the major themes, patterns, and emerging trends in the literature published between 2020 and 2025 that focus on Gen Z's research orientation and data literacy.
- Examine the influence of digital literacy, artificial intelligence, and technology enhanced learning environments on the development of Gen Z students' research skills and analytical capabilities.
- Explore existing pedagogical models and instructional strategies that effectively support research competence, critical thinking, and data-handling skills within commerce education.
- Highlight gaps, limitations, and areas requiring further investigation, ultimately proposing directions for future research that can strengthen data-informed and research-driven teaching practices.

METHODOLOGY

1.1 Research Design

This study followed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, using the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to maintain clarity, transparency, and methodological rigor throughout the review process. The PRISMA framework helped ensure that every step from identifying studies to selecting and evaluating them was conducted in a structured and reproducible manner.

1.2 Data Source and Search Strategy

Scopus was chosen as the primary database because of its extensive collection of peer-reviewed research across business, management, and education disciplines. Its wide coverage made it an ideal source for capturing high-quality studies relevant to Generation Z, digital literacy, and research orientation.

To capture studies closely aligned with the objectives of this review, a structured set of Boolean keywords was used. These keywords were selected to reflect concepts related to Generation Z, digital literacy, research orientation, and higher education learning environments.

The final search string used in Scopus (Search Query) was:

("Gen Z" OR "Generation Z" OR "digital natives" OR "research orientation" OR "research skills" OR "research attitude" OR "data literacy" OR "digital literacy" OR "information literacy" OR "commerce education" OR "business education" OR "management education" OR "higher education" OR "university students") AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))

This query ensured that only recent, English-language, peer-reviewed studies focusing on Generation Z and their research or digital-literacy competencies were retrieved.

1.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure that only the most relevant and high-quality studies were considered, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied during the screening process. These criteria helped narrow the search to papers that directly addressed Generation Z, digital literacy, and research-oriented learning within higher education.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies published between 2020 and 2025	Studies published before 2020
Peer reviewed journal articles and review papers	Conference papers, theses, dissertations, and book chapters

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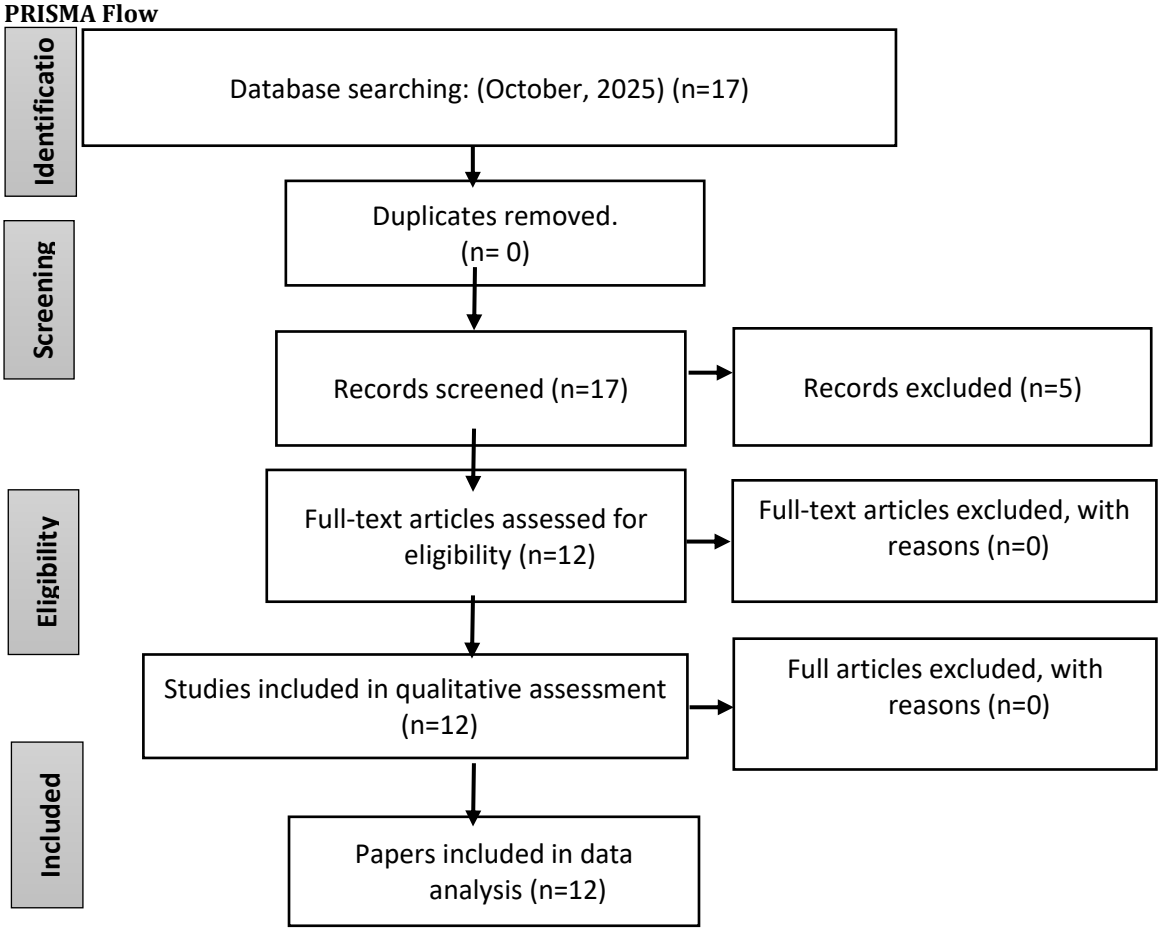
Research focusing on Generation Z, digital literacy, research skills, or technology enhanced learning	Studies not related to Gen Z or not connected to higher education
Articles published in English	Publications in languages other than English
Research involving higher education students, particularly from commerce or business disciplines	Studies involving primary or secondary school students

1.4 Selection Process

The database search resulted in 17 initial records. After removing duplicates and reviewing the titles and abstracts, 12 studies were found suitable for further consideration. These articles were then examined in full to ensure they met the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This process is summarized in the PRISMA flow, which outlines the four main stages of the review: identification, screening, eligibility, and final inclusion.

PRISMA Flow



1.5 Interpretation and Analysis of the Results

This section presents the interpretation and analysis of the findings derived from the systematic literature review. Following the PRISMA procedure, a total of 12 studies were included in the final synthesis. The overall patterns emerging from these studies reveal consistent thematic directions and conceptual insights concerning research orientation and data literacy among Gen Z commerce students. The collective evidence suggests that the majority of the literature places considerable emphasis on exploring how Gen Z learners engage with research processes and how well they develop the data literacy skills required in contemporary commerce education. The subsequent charts generated from the Scopus search further illustrate these trends by mapping publication behaviour, subject-area distribution, institutional contributions, and geographical engagement within this research domain.

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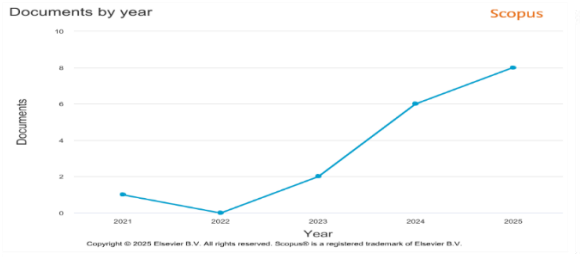

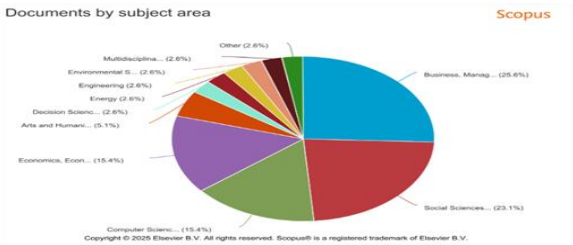

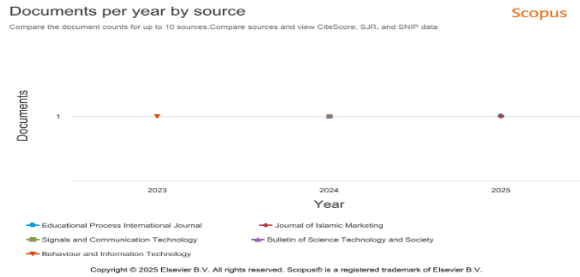

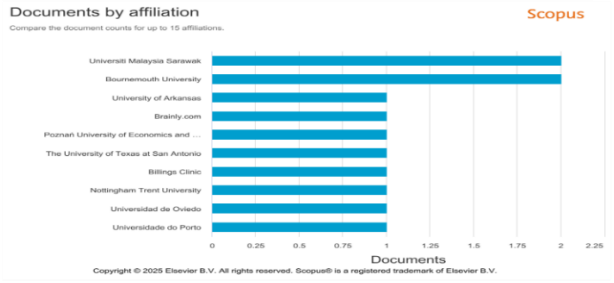

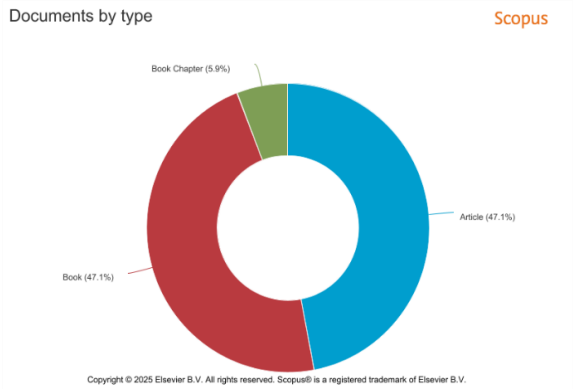

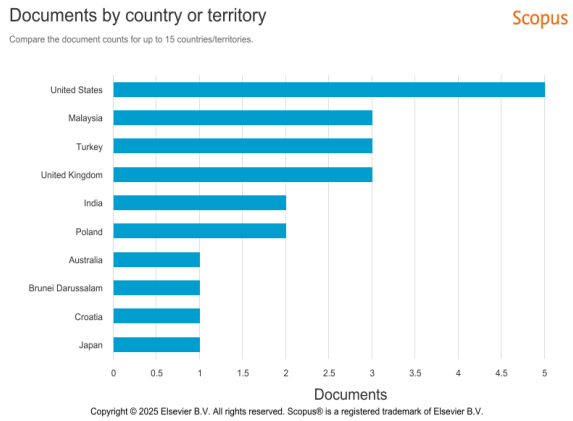

The bibliometric patterns generated from the Scopus search provide a comprehensive picture of the current research landscape on Gen Z commerce students' research orientation and data literacy. The year-wise publication trend shows a gradual and consistent increase, suggesting that scholarly attention toward this topic has strengthened over time. This progression reflects the growing need to understand how Gen Z often viewed as digitally fluent learners engages with research practices and data-related competencies.

The subject-area distribution reveals that most studies fall under Business, Management, and Accounting, while additional contributions come from Social Sciences and Computer Science. This interdisciplinary spread indicates that the topic is not limited to commerce education alone; rather, it is informed by broader perspectives on learning behavior, digital skills, and analytical capability.

The diversity of publication sources, visible in the documents-per-source chart, shows that the literature is not concentrated in a single journal or conference. Instead, studies are dispersed across various Scopus-indexed outlets, signaling that the field is still emerging and drawing interest from different academic communities. The affiliation data further support this, showing contributions from a wide range of universities, without any single institution dominating the field.

The document-type distribution where journal articles form the majority suggests a gradual shift toward more rigorous, peer-reviewed research, with conference papers contributing early insights. Meanwhile, the country-wise distribution shows active contributions from both Western and Asian regions, including the United States, Malaysia, Turkey, India, and Indonesia. This global involvement highlights the universal importance of understanding Gen Z students in an increasingly data-driven academic and professional environment.

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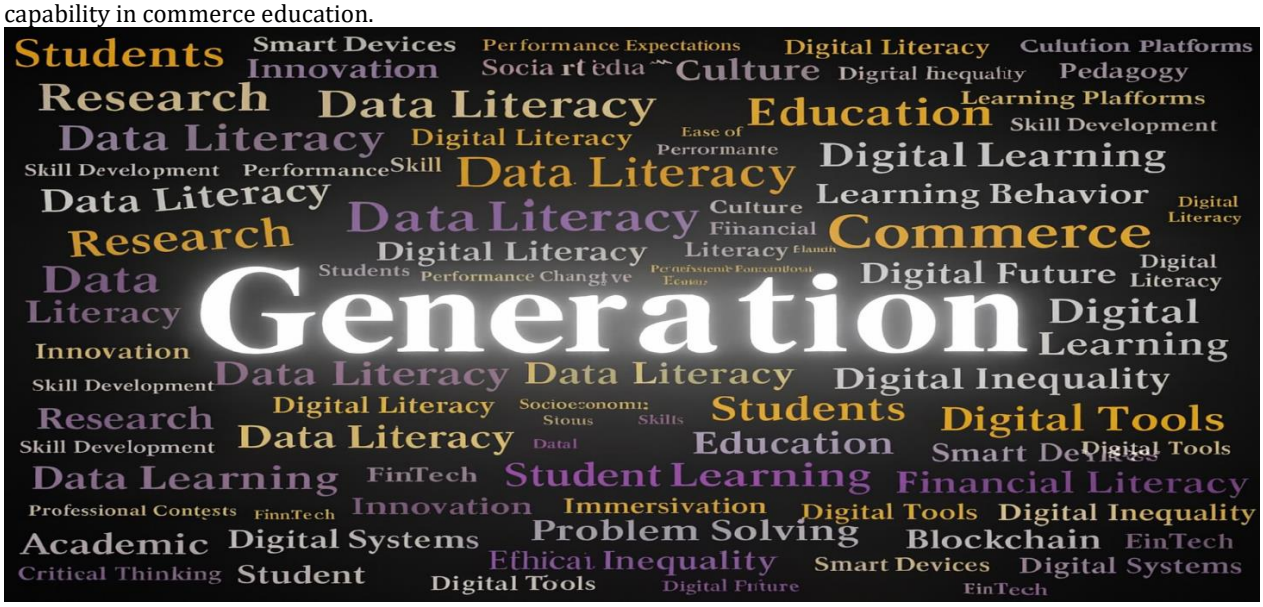
Taken together, these Scopus-based bibliometric patterns show that research on Gen Z commerce students' research orientation and data literacy is expanding, interdisciplinary, globally distributed, and progressively maturing. They collectively demonstrate that educators and researchers worldwide recognize the need to strengthen research and data skills among Gen Z learners to better prepare them for contemporary academic and professional demands.

1.6 Word Cloud Analysis

To visually synthesise the recurring concepts within the reviewed literature, a word cloud was generated using the most frequently appearing terms related to research orientation and data literacy among Gen Z commerce students. This visual representation highlights the dominant themes that consistently emerge across the studies such as "digital literacy," "data skills," "technology use," "critical thinking," "research mindset," and "commerce students." The prominence of these terms suggests that Gen Z learners are strongly shaped by technology driven learning environments and increasingly require data-focused competencies to succeed in academic and professional settings. The word cloud therefore serves as a complementary analytical tool, helping to illustrate the conceptual concentration of the topic while reinforcing the importance of digital readiness and research capability in commerce education.



RESULTS ANALYSIS

The systematic review of twelve peer reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2025 reveals four interrelated themes that collectively explain how Generation Z interacts with digital technologies, builds digital literacy, and adapts to modern learning environments. These themes offer a structured understanding of Gen Z's technological behaviors, their learning preferences, and the broader educational implications of their digital lifestyles.

1.7 Gen Z as Digital Natives

Across the broader literature, Generation Z is consistently portrayed as the most technologically immersed and digitally adaptive generation to date. Unlike previous cohorts who had to learn and adjust to technological change, Gen Z has grown up with constant access to the internet, smartphones, and digitally mediated communication. Szymkowiak et al. (2021) emphasize that this early and uninterrupted exposure has shaped not only their learning habits but also their ways of thinking, interacting, and solving problems. For many Gen Z learners, technology is not an external tool but a natural extension of how they engage with the world.

The findings of Kenon and Bartlett (2025) further support this idea by showing that Gen Z feels naturally at home in digital ecosystems. They are comfortable multitasking across platforms, navigating online information streams, and adapting to new applications with minimal guidance. This digital ease influences their preferences for interactive content, quick access to information, and learning experiences that combine visual, auditory, and participatory elements.

Arghashi and Gunalay (2025) add an additional dimension by highlighting Gen Z's fluency in virtual environments, smart devices, and emerging immersive technologies. Their use of social media is not limited to communication these platforms also serve as spaces for learning, self-expression, and identity formation. This multifaceted engagement demonstrates that digital fluency for Gen Z goes beyond technical skills; it reflects a mindset shaped by connectivity, speed, and constant access to information.

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Taken together, these studies illustrate that being "digital natives" is not simply a descriptive label for Gen Z. It represents a deeper cultural shift where digital behaviors, preferences, and competencies form a central part of their identity and significantly influence how they learn, collaborate, and interact in educational environments.

1.8 Determinants of Technology Adoption

A second major theme across the literature relates to the factors that shape Gen Z's adoption of contemporary digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), financial technologies (FinTech), blockchain applications, and smart devices. Studies such as those by Kavitha and Joshith (2024), Alzahrani and Bhunia (2025), Chee-Hua et al. (2024), and Jalil et al. (2025) consistently highlight several core determinants influencing adoption. Among the most prominent are performance expectations how useful or beneficial the technology appears alongside ease of use, which reflects how effortlessly Gen Z can integrate these tools into their daily activities. Social influence also plays a meaningful role, as Gen Z is highly responsive to peer usage trends, online communities, and social media signals when deciding whether to try new technologies.

Digital literacy stands out as a crucial mediating factor across these studies. It not only enhances an individual's confidence in navigating new technological environments but also bridges the gap between being aware of a technology and actively applying it. This is particularly evident in academic and financial settings, where AI driven platforms, digital learning tools, and FinTech services are becoming increasingly embedded in everyday tasks.

Furthermore, socioeconomic status significantly shapes patterns of technology access and usage. Kobul (2023) demonstrates that disparities in income, resources, and digital infrastructure continue to influence how young people engage with technology. These inequalities affect not only their exposure to advanced tools but also their capacity to develop the skills needed to fully benefit from them. As a result, digital adoption among Gen Z is not uniform; it reflects broader social and economic conditions that continue to shape learning opportunities and technological confidence.

1.9 Concerns About Digital Literacy and Ethics

While digital technologies offer significant advantages, the literature also highlights a growing set of concerns related to digital literacy, responsible use, and ethical implications. Garcia et al. (2025) warn that the rapid adoption of AI in educational settings may create new challenges, including the risk of skill obsolescence as students rely too heavily on automated systems, the potential for misuse of intelligent tools, and the persistent problem of algorithmic bias. Their work suggests that without proper guidance, students may become dependent on AI technologies in ways that hinder the development of independent judgment and analytical skills. These concerns point to the need for balanced strategies that emphasize critical thinking, human oversight, and informed decision-making alongside technological integration.

Sutherland (2025) expands this discussion by emphasizing the necessity of structured social-media literacy within academic environments. Given Gen Z's deep engagement with digital platforms, he argues that educational programs must actively teach students how to navigate online information responsibly. Without such frameworks, learners are vulnerable to misinformation, emotional exhaustion from constant digital consumption, and the habit of absorbing online content without adequate evaluation. These insights collectively underline that digital proficiency today must go beyond technical skills it requires ethical awareness, critical reflection, and the ability to engage with technology in a thoughtful and informed manner.

1.10 Implications for Education and Skills Development

The final theme that emerges from the literature highlights important implications for educational practice, curriculum design, and the development of future-ready skills. Hughes and Gosney (2025) and Christina Chin et al. (2025) emphasize that Gen Z learners respond best to learning environments that prioritize research abilities, project management competencies, and hands n digital skills that mirror real workplace expectations. Their findings suggest that traditional lecture based approaches are no longer sufficient for a generation accustomed to interactive content, rapid information access, and technology-enhanced learning experiences. Instead, educators are encouraged to adopt more dynamic, participatory methods that blend digital tools with problem-solving, collaboration, and experiential learning.

Sutherland (2025) reinforces this viewpoint by proposing concrete strategies for embedding digital competencies particularly social-media literacy and digitally supported learning activities directly into the curriculum. He argues that intentional integration is necessary to ensure that education aligns with Gen Z's digital behaviors, communication styles, and evolving professional pathways. Together, these studies highlight a broader shift in educational priorities: preparing Gen Z not only to use technology, but to use it strategically, responsibly, and effectively within academic and professional contexts.

DISCUSSION

1.11 Technology Centric Learning Ecosystem

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that Generation Z is immersed in a deeply technology-centric learning environment, where digital tools form the backbone of their daily activities. For this cohort, technology is not an optional enhancement but a fundamental part of how they communicate, study, collaborate, and solve problems. Their routine use of smartphones, cloud-based platforms, AI-assisted applications, and interactive digital content reflects a seamless integration of technology into both personal and academic life. This constant

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exposure shapes their expectations of learning environments, which they prefer to be dynamic, visually engaging, and supported by real-time digital interaction.

Gen Z's strong inclination toward platforms such as AI-supported learning tools, mobile learning applications, and interactive virtual resources indicates a natural alignment with technology-enriched educational ecosystems. These behaviors highlight why theoretical models such as UTAUT2 and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) are widely used to analyze their technology adoption patterns. These frameworks effectively capture key factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment, and social influence that strongly shape Gen Z's acceptance of educational technologies.

The literature also shows that continuous digital exposure influences how Gen Z forms learning habits. Their familiarity with multitasking, instant feedback systems, and highly adaptive applications leads them to value flexibility and personalization in learning. As a result, they tend to prefer environments where information is easily accessible, content is interactive, and digital tools support autonomy in learning.

Collectively, the studies suggest that for Generation Z, technology is not simply a tool used occasionally; it is embedded in how they think, learn, communicate, and engage with educational content. Their learning ecosystem is therefore best understood as a technology-driven landscape, where digital platforms shape not only the methods of learning but also the motivations, expectations, and overall experiences of learners.

1.12 Digital Literacy as a Critical Competency

Across all twelve studies, digital literacy consistently emerges as the most important competency linking technology engagement, learning outcomes, and behavioral patterns among Generation Z. While this cohort is widely recognized for its frequent use of digital tools, the literature makes it clear that their level of digital literacy not simply their exposure to technology is what determines how effectively they navigate platforms such as AI based applications, blockchain systems, metaverse environments, FinTech services, and smart devices.

Digital literacy extends beyond knowing how to operate technological tools. It includes the ability to search for information efficiently, evaluate the credibility of online sources, manage digital identities responsibly, and understand the ethical implications of online behavior. The studies further show that these skills influence Gen Z's participation in academic activities, collaboration in virtual environments, financial decision-making through digital platforms, and even entrepreneurial initiatives that depend on data-driven tools.

A central insight within this theme is the mediation effect highlighted by Alzahrani and Bhunia (2025). Their findings indicate that technology adoption alone cannot produce meaningful outcomes without strong digital literacy skills. Access does not automatically translate into effective use. For instance, students may use AI tools but fail to interpret outputs critically, or they may engage with blockchain or FinTech applications without fully understanding the risks and underlying mechanisms. This reinforces the idea that digital literacy serves as a bridge between technological availability and productive, responsible engagement.

Moreover, the studies point out that digital literacy also supports soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-regulated learning, all of which are essential in technology-rich learning environments. As a result, digital literacy functions not only as a technical ability but also as a comprehensive developmental requirement that enables Gen Z to participate confidently and ethically in academic and professional settings.

Collectively, these findings underline the need for educational institutions to prioritize digital-literacy development in their curricula. Strengthening this competency ensures that Gen Z learners are not just users of technology but informed and capable participants in an increasingly digital world.

1.13 Socioeconomic and Cultural Differences

While Generation Z is often labeled as a "digitally native" generation, the evidence shows that this digital identity is not uniformly distributed. Studies such as Kobul (2023) challenge the assumption that all Gen Z learners possess equal levels of technological competence. Instead, socioeconomic conditions play a decisive role in shaping digital behavior, access to devices, and opportunities for skill development. Students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds frequently encounter obstacles including unreliable internet connections, limited access to up-to-date devices, and restricted exposure to advanced software or learning platforms. These constraints reduce their ability to practice, explore, and master digital tools at the same pace as their peers.

As a result, digital literacy levels vary widely even within the same age group. The literature suggests that while some Gen Z learners comfortably navigate AI tools, coding environments, FinTech applications, or immersive platforms, others struggle with basic digital-navigation skills. This uneven distribution of digital competence produces visible differences in academic performance, confidence in using technology, and readiness for digital workplaces.

Cultural factors also contribute to these disparities. In some communities, technology is used mainly for entertainment rather than learning; in others, concerns about privacy, social norms, or language barriers limit young people's online participation. These contextual influences shape not only how Gen Z interacts with digital tools but also how they perceive the value and risks associated with technology.

Collectively, the findings underscore that Generation Z should not be viewed as a single, uniform digital cohort. Educators and policymakers must recognize the complexities hidden beneath the "digital native" label and design targeted strategies such as inclusive digital-literacy training, affordable device access, and community-based digital support systems to bridge the digital divide. Addressing these inequalities is essential to ensure that all Gen Z learners benefit equally from technology enhanced education.

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1.14 Ethical and Pedagogical Challenges

While artificial intelligence and other advanced digital tools offer remarkable possibilities for education, they also introduce a new set of ethical and teaching-related challenges. Garcia et al. (2025) point out concerns such as algorithmic bias, misuse of AI-generated content, and the growing tendency of students to rely too heavily on automated systems. These issues raise practical questions: Are students still developing core skills? Are they thinking critically about the information AI provides? And how can educators ensure fairness and transparency when digital systems themselves may have limitations?

Because of these concerns, it becomes essential for educators to go beyond simply using digital tools and instead help students understand them responsibly. This includes building ethical awareness, strengthening critical thinking, and encouraging informed decision-making. Sutherland (2025) and Hughes and Gosney (2025) echo this need, arguing that teaching practices must evolve to match today's digital realities. They recommend incorporating responsible online behavior, structured social-media literacy, and modern teaching strategies that reflect how Gen Z naturally learns and interacts with technology.

Together, the studies show that technology can greatly enrich learning but only when paired with thoughtful guidance and updated pedagogical approaches that protect academic integrity and support genuine skill development.

1.15 Implications for Commerce, Finance, and Business Education

The inclusion of studies examining blockchain technologies, FinTech applications, and digital marketing practices highlights how deeply digital transformation is reshaping the expectations of commerce and business education. Findings from Jalil et al. (2025) and Alzahrani and Bhunia (2025) show that Generation Z's early exposure to mobile banking, digital payments, cryptocurrency platforms, and automated financial tools equips them with a level of familiarity that previous generations did not possess. This natural comfort with technology enhances their readiness to participate in digital marketplaces, data-driven decision-making, and tech-enabled business processes.

Beyond financial technologies, Sutherland (2025) stresses the growing relevance of social-media management, online branding, and content analytics skills that are now fundamental to marketing, entrepreneurship, and business communication. For today's learners, managing a digital presence is not simply a personal activity; it is an essential professional competency that influences career opportunities and business growth.

Taken together, these studies indicate that commerce, finance, and business programs must adapt their curricula to reflect these emerging realities. Integrating modules on FinTech operations, blockchain fundamentals, digital marketing strategies, and data literacy can significantly strengthen students' employability and overall career preparedness. Moreover, such curricular updates encourage the development of an entrepreneurial mindset characterized by innovation, adaptability, and the ability to operate confidently in digital-first business environments.

Ultimately, the evidence suggests that digital integration is not optional in business education. It has become a structural necessity aligned with global industry expectations, ensuring that graduates can effectively navigate and contribute to rapidly evolving economic systems.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review shows that Generation Z is a highly digital group of learners who are comfortable using tools such as AI applications, blockchain systems, FinTech services, and smart technologies. Their familiarity with these platforms reflects the environment they have grown up in. However, the review also makes it clear that not all Gen Z learners have the same level of digital competence. Differences in digital literacy and socioeconomic background significantly influence how well they are able to use and benefit from modern technologies in both education and work.

While Gen Z is generally open and enthusiastic about adopting new technologies, the studies reviewed also point to several important challenges. Concerns related to ethical use, responsible behavior online, and the possibility of shallow or incomplete adoption appear frequently in the literature. These issues highlight that providing technology alone is not enough. Students must also learn how to think critically about digital tools, understand their limitations, and use them in a thoughtful and responsible way.

The findings also show that educational institutions have an essential role in supporting Gen Z's development. Integrating digital-literacy training, awareness of ethical AI practices, and responsible use of technology into the curriculum can help students navigate digital environments with confidence. Addressing inequality in access to digital tools is equally important to ensure that all learners have fair opportunities to participate in technology-enabled learning.

Moreover, the literature suggests that teaching methods need to evolve to match Gen Z's learning style. Approaches that are interactive, technology-supported, and designed to encourage engagement and hands-on learning tend to be more effective. Building skills such as research ability, project management, and practical problem-solving will further help Gen Z transition into today's digital workplaces.

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In summary, Generation Z has strong potential to succeed in a technology-driven world. Realizing this potential requires updated curricula, supportive educational policies, and comprehensive digital-skills development that encourage students not only to use technology, but to use it wisely, ethically, and with purpose.

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ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SHAPING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS

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Abstract

Introduction: In the fast pace of life, the crucial role that education plays in raising responsible citizens is a matter of concern which needs to be analysed. Education is the base of one's foundation and thus, the paper investigates the role that education plays in shaping responsible citizens. Purpose : The increasing use of digital information has raised a concern whether the education is impartment of knowledge or a holistic development of an individual's personality. This study was conducted to investigate the role of education in shaping responsible citizens. Methodology: The research is qualitative research aiming at objective, reliable, and careful observation and reading of the facts in light of various issues to attain a comprehensive outlook Extensive reading, library work, survey of literature, interpretation of video resources and evaluation, and other relevant work processes have been done to understand the realistic situation better and add new perspectives to the research. Key findings: Education is a vital process and a crucial part of life. It helps to develop cognitive skills. It is not confined to the four walls of a classroom but it encompasses every aspect under it. It refers to the holistic development of an individual. The study demonstrated that education plays a pivotal role in shaping responsible citizens. These findings highlight the need of education in present scenario to ensure the complete development of an individual. Conclusion: It is therefore to be concluded that education acts as a source of empowerment and enlightenment to shape responsible citizens. One should aim to cultivate good cultural, moral values to enlighten others so that the education acts as a tool to nurture and groom one's personality.

Keywords :*Digital, Holistic, Cognitive, Empowerment, Enlightenment*

Herbert Spencer says, " As physical maturity is marked by the ability to produce offspring, so mental ability is marked by the ability to train those offspring." (Spencer, 1929, p. 99)

The word education encompasses a complete range of meaning diversifying its area from overall development to individualistic development. Education is not confined within four walls of classroom but it is beyond it. The purpose of education is to form character, to prepare for living, and to produce sound mind in a sound body. Education is a never-ending process as it starts from cradle to grave. Education begins at an individual level, influencing one's understanding of the world, shaping identity, and empowering people to unlock their full potential. From early childhood to adulthood, education plays a crucial role in cultivating cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence, and ethical reasoning. Formal schooling introduces children to the basics of reading, writing, and numeracy, but more importantly, it nurtures curiosity, encourages creativity, and develops critical thinking.

Education has long been recognised as one of the most powerful instruments for personal, social, and national transformation. As the world moves rapidly into an era characterised by advanced technologies, global interdependence, and unprecedented challenges, the importance of education in shaping our future becomes even more pronounced. Education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge or a means to secure employment; it is a transformative process that equips individuals with the intellect, values, skills, and attitudes necessary to navigate and contribute meaningfully to an ever-changing world.

Moreover, education enhances communication skills, enabling individuals to express their ideas clearly and interact effectively with others. Ultimately, education empowers individuals to lead fulfilling lives, make responsible decisions, and contribute positively to society. As individuals progress in their educational journey, they learn to analyse information, solve problems, and make informed decisions—skills that are essential in every aspect of life. Education also fosters confidence and self-awareness. It helps individuals recognise their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and aspirations.

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Education is a term that is identified with imparting knowledge, values and shaping an individual's personality. In today's scenario, the advent of technology, AI and various tools have felicitated the information and has led to the tremendous overflow of energy. It has been observed that the way advancement is taking place, the world is becoming a global village and information is being passed within fraction of second. In order to make the next generation responsible, lot of efforts are required . To shape responsible citizens has become our priority .They are adapting everything so fast but they are not responsible if proper education is not imparted to them. It is further to be analysed that as educators, it becomes crucial to make them understand the value of education as well as the difference between education and information. The misconception is that they consider information as education and therefore rely more on ChatGPT and Google instead of teachers. They do not know the difference between a human and a machine and their reliance is more on machines than their own intelligence. It has become very challenging to guide them and provide proper direction as their dependence is more on Internet. The easy availability and cheap usage has further pushed this to another level. It is a matter of investigation how can education build, mould and shape responsible citizens. Earlier, the word of teacher used to be of utmost importance but now, the parenting style and methods of parenting are sheltering the kids due to which they don't come out of their comfort zone. It has tripled the pressure on teachers who cater to child, parent as well as administration. The intervention of parents has made the child doubt teacher more. There are many transformative practices being adopted by NEP regarding curriculum to strengthen their concepts but the willingness to study is lacking.

ROLE OF EDUCATION

Education has various roles to fulfil. As Malcolm Forbes says-
"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one."
Education plays a central role in nurturing creativity by encouraging curiosity, imagination, and experimentation. Traditional education systems often emphasised rote learning and memorisation, but modern approaches highlight the importance of inquiry-based learning, exploration, and problem-solving. Creative education allows students to question existing ideas, propose new solutions, and envision alternative possibilities. Innovation thrives in environments where learners are encouraged to think independently, and embrace failure as a learning opportunity. Schools and universities can foster creativity through interdisciplinary learning, arts education, project-based learning, and opportunities for research. Another philosopher William S. Burroughs says-
"The aim of education is the knowledge, not of facts, but of values."
A nation's progress is not measured merely through its economic indices or technological advancements, but by the quality of its citizens. Responsible citizens form the backbone of a thriving society. They uphold the values of integrity, respect, empathy, and accountability, actively contributing to social harmony and development. However, such citizens do not emerge by accident. They are shaped intentionally through a combination of education, family influence, community involvement, governance, and personal experiences. A very famous personality who changed the world, Nelson Mandela says,
"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."
Beyond individual development, education plays a pivotal role in shaping societies. It fosters social cohesion by promoting shared values such as equality, justice, tolerance, and respect for diversity. A well-educated population is better equipped to address social issues such as poverty, discrimination, and violence. Education encourages people to question unjust practices, challenge stereotypes, and advocate for a more inclusive society. A society that values education and invests in skill development creates an environment conducive to business growth and technological advancement. Therefore, education is not merely a personal investment but a national asset that fuels economic prosperity. Another educationist Herbert Spencer is of the opinion-
"The education of most value for guidance , must at the same time be the education of most value for discipline."
(Spencer, 1929, p. 44)
Education contributes to peaceful societies by promoting dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. In multicultural and multiethnic nations, education helps bridge gaps between communities by fostering a sense of shared identity and national unity. By teaching the principles of democracy, human rights, and citizenship, education prepares individuals to participate actively and responsibly in civic life. It nurtures informed citizens who can vote wisely, engage in debates, and hold institutions accountable.In an article ,Farmonova ,Ikramova and Burkhanova says,"Education can bring about social change by changing people's worldviews and attitudes. It can bring about changes in patterns of social relationships, thereby producing social change."
Education is arguably the most powerful mechanism for shaping responsible citizens. Schools are not just centers of academic learning but also spaces where students discover how to interact with peers, understand society, and develop values. Civic education helps students understand democratic processes, rights, responsibilities, and the functioning of societal institutions. Moral education cultivates virtues such as honesty, fairness, empathy, and courage. Another famous personality John F. Kennedy says-
"The goal of education is the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of truth."
Education equips individuals with the skills required to participate in the workforce, innovate, and adapt to economic shifts. Basic education ensures literacy and numeracy, while higher education and vocational training

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provide specialised knowledge and technical skills relevant to specific industries. The teaching in secondary schools is considered a particular knowledge 'gateway' for developing students' knowledge and their orientations as citizens. Education enables nations to build a competent workforce capable of meeting the challenges of industrialisation, digitalisation, and global competition. Trained professionals—engineers, doctors, teachers, scientists, entrepreneurs—are indispensable to economic progress.

In the 21st century, technology has become central to nearly every aspect of human life. Education plays a critical role in fostering technological progress by cultivating skilled scientists, engineers, and innovators who push the boundaries of knowledge. Moreover, technology is reshaping education itself. Digital learning platforms, online courses, interactive tools, and virtual classrooms have expanded access to education worldwide. Students can now learn at their own pace, explore new subjects, and acquire digital literacy—an essential skill in today's world. Education in digital skills ensures that future generations can work effectively in technologically advanced environments. It can only be seen as a collaborative force to bring about social change determined by the forces having greater power in society, needs to be completely reviewed. Education is the only wealth that cannot be robbed. Teaching is generally considered to be an art. Earlier the teacher used to be 'a sage on the stage', they now need to become 'a guide on the side', (Biesta, 2025)

The question of how to shape responsible citizens is therefore central to any society that aspires to long-term prosperity and ethical integrity. "What distinguishes education? First of all, I would say the presence of a teacher. Learning can be done by yourself or in all kinds of systems. Education requires at least two parties, the student and the teacher. That's distinctive of education." (Biesta, 2025)

SHAPING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS

Before discussing how to shape responsible citizens, it is important to define what responsibility truly entails. Responsible citizenship is not limited to paying taxes, voting, or obeying laws—though these are important aspects. It encompasses a broader mindset and set of behaviors such as: Awareness of rights and duties, Commitment to social harmony and inclusivity, Respect for diversity and human dignity, Ethical behavior in personal and public life, Critical thinking and informed decision-making, Active participation in community development, Civility in public discourse, and Compassion and empathy for fellow citizens.

Values are first learned at home. Parents and family members are children's earliest role models. What they observe at home significantly influences their behavior. Children imitate adults. If they see honesty, punctuality, kindness, respect, and hard work consistently modeled, they will internalize these traits. Open communication, emotional support, and the freedom to express opinions help children develop confidence and responsibility. Chores and small tasks teach discipline, accountability, and teamwork. When children are encouraged to help in household work, take care of belongings, or help siblings, they understand responsibility early.

The parents are the first educators of the child, and they still maintain an educative function throughout the child's upbringing…the school and the home are still only two of the many agencies of education. When education is defined in the wider sense as the development of personality, it is something which goes on outside, as well as inside the home and the school. (Ottaway, p. 7)

The formative years offer the best opportunity to shape responsible citizens. Small daily habits—cleaning up after oneself, being punctual, completing homework—lay the foundation for larger responsibilities. Group activities teach cooperation, conflict resolution, and shared responsibility. Positive reinforcement—praise, trust, recognition—motivates children to act responsibly.

Thus, shaping responsible citizens requires cultivating both the mind (awareness, knowledge) and character (values, behavior). It is a lifelong process—starting in childhood but reinforced throughout adulthood by systems and social structures. Responsible citizens must be able to reason, question, and analyze rather than blindly follow. When students see fairness, equality, and respect practiced around them, they absorb these values naturally. When young people take responsibility for tasks, manage events, or lead teams, they learn real-world lessons in cooperation and ethics. Clear, fair, and consistent rules at home teach the importance of boundaries. When children understand consequences, they respect social laws and norms later in life. Discussing how actions affect others, reading stories that highlight kindness, and guiding children to express gratitude help nurture compassionate adults.

Responsible citizenship requires continuous learning—about society, environment, technology, and culture. Doing the right thing—even when no one is watching—is the cornerstone of responsibility. Responsibility is not limited to youth; adults also need continuous guidance. Adults must contribute to civic life—voting, participating in local meetings, volunteering, or supporting environmental initiatives. Temples, churches, mosques, and community centers can promote ethical living through teachings, charity drives, and service programs. As Ottaway says,

The educator, in accordance with the aims he accepts, attempts to develop the personality of the child and to prepare him for membership of his society. This dual function of education corresponds to the double role a person has to play in life, both as an individual and as a member of society. (Ottaway, pp. 3-4)

Education equips people with these capabilities, ensuring they remain relevant and competitive in the future workplace. Lifelong learning—continuous skill development throughout one's career—is becoming increasingly important, and education systems must adapt to support this shift. Beyond academic knowledge and technical

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skills, education plays a crucial role in shaping ethical values and moral judgement. Schools and universities are not only centres of learning but also spaces where individuals form principles that guide their behaviour. Through discussions, literature, role models, and real-life situations, education instils values such as honesty, compassion, integrity, fairness, and responsibility. Moral education helps individuals distinguish between right and wrong, evaluate their actions, and make ethical choices. In a world characterised by moral dilemmas, ethical conflicts, and rapid technological changes, the ability to think ethically is essential. Education also promotes leadership qualities, preparing individuals to influence and guide others with integrity and vision. Thus, education plays a foundational role in building a morally conscious and ethically aware future.

Educated social reformers emphasize values such as the elimination of caste limits, equality of women, the elimination of socially harmful social customs and practices, the right to have a say in the governance of the country, and the establishment of democratic institutions did. In other words, they saw education as the flame or light of knowledge that dispels the darkness of ignorance." (Azamatovna & Odil qizi , 2022)

As we stand at the crossroads of rapid global change, it is imperative to recognise the indispensable role of education in shaping a better tomorrow. Investing in education—ensuring its quality, accessibility, and relevance—is not just a policy priority but a moral responsibility. A well-educated society is a resilient, innovative, and compassionate society capable of navigating future challenges and creating a world that values knowledge, equity, and human dignity. In essence, education does not just prepare us for the future; it builds the future itself.

As Tolibboyeva and Sotiboldiyeva says ,"Learning includes the moral values and the improvement of character and the methods to increase the strength of mind." Moreover Suardi says,

Moral values as respect and responsibility can be formed a strong citizen character, especially if the teacher carries out the learning process professionally, and makes him/herself a model in the formation of citizen character… However, parental guidance must have an impact on the child's personality where parents should foster directly and indirectly in education at home, school, and in the community. (Suardi, 2023)

The term responsibility is an umbrella term under which many things come. It is to be noted that responsible citizens are necessary for the nation but the way upbringing is taking place, the irresponsible citizens are rising more. If you look at the road, lot of people are driving recklessly , people are using money carelessly and life is being spent aimlessly. Responsibility is not the prerogative of any person. Education assists a lot in making this possible by providing better teachers, educators and administrators to the nation. The Students are the bright future of our country and if they are misguided, the nation will fall. If they are given the right direction, they will provide the good services to the nation. It will culminate in shaping the nation. It becomes a collective responsibility on both parts to ensure a smooth way wherein the student becomes a responsible citizen and offer their best service. In all matters whether be defense, political, social , cultural , economic, responsibility is mandatory for a bright future. As we are an emerging economy, we need to grasp the idea how to cultivate and garner their innate talent and provide them support for the same.

CONCLUSION

Shaping responsible citizens is a collective, continuous process involving education, family, community, government, and personal effort. It is not a task accomplished overnight but a lifelong journey of nurturing values, knowledge, and ethical behavior. A responsible citizen is not defined by age, status, or intelligence but by the willingness to act with integrity, contribute to society, respect others, and uphold the common good.

When societies invest in shaping responsible citizens, they build the foundations of peace, prosperity, and progress. A nation of responsible individuals can overcome any challenge—social, economic, or environmental—because its people act not out of compulsion, but out of conscience. Ultimately, the future of any nation lies in the hands of its citizens, and shaping responsible citizens is the greatest service one generation can offer the next.

Education is the foundation upon which individuals, societies, and nations build their futures. It shapes personal growth, promotes social equality, fuels economic development, drives technological innovation, and supports global sustainability. More than a tool for academic advancement, education is a transformative force that empowers individuals to realise their potential, engage responsibly with the world, and contribute to the collective progress of humanity. As teachers, we are there temporarily, but, at the end of the day, it's over to our students and their life in the world. The work of a teacher is always to open doors, particularly where students didn't even know that there was a door, and each time we open the door to the world, we also open the door to the self.

Herbert further suggests, " Lastly, always recollect that to educate rightly is not a simple and easy thing, but a complex and extremely difficult thing, the hardest task which devolves on adult life." (Spencer, 1929, p. 133)

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INTEGRATING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING WITH THE INQUIRY TRAINING MODEL FOR GEN Z CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Generation Z learners bring unique strengths to today's classrooms, including creativity, digital fluency, and a natural curiosity that drives exploration and innovation. They respond best to learning experiences that are interactive, meaningful, and directly connected to real-world challenges, emphasizing relevance and engagement over rote memorization. Recognizing these evolving learner needs, India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) advocate for joyful, experiential, and inquiry-oriented learning environments that promote holistic development, conceptual clarity, and higher-order thinking skills.

In response to this pedagogical landscape, the present article introduces a comprehensive instructional framework that integrates Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) with Suchman's Inquiry Training Model (ITM). By combining these two evidence-based approaches, the model encourages curiosity-driven exploration, reflective thinking, evidence-based understanding, and confident application of knowledge across diverse learning contexts. It enables students not only to grasp concepts deeply but also to connect learning to authentic problems, fostering skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and self-directed learning—essential competencies for Gen Z learners. The framework aligns closely with NEP 2020's emphasis on competency-based, experiential, and multidisciplinary education while providing teachers with a structured yet flexible approach for lesson planning and classroom implementation. Through extended discussions, concrete classroom illustrations across multiple subjects, illustrative tables, and visual diagrams, this article aims to offer educators and teacher trainees a practical, holistic guide for designing future-ready learning environments. Ultimately, the integrated ELC-ITM framework serves as a bridge between contemporary pedagogical theory and classroom practice, equipping teachers to engage Generation Z learners effectively while fostering lifelong learning habits and holistic development.

KEYWORDS: *Generation Z learners, Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), Competency-based education, Collaborative learning, Critical thinking skills, Active learning strategies*

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z learners—born approximately between 1997 and 2012—are growing up in a world shaped by digital devices, visual information, interactive platforms, and constant connectivity. They approach learning with energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity, exhibiting a strong preference for hands-on, creative, and reflective experiences. These learners value opportunities to explore ideas, collaborate with peers, express creativity, and connect classroom learning to authentic, real-world situations. Such characteristics make them highly receptive to learning environments that are dynamic, interactive, and inquiry-driven, highlighting the need for pedagogical strategies that go beyond traditional lecture-based methods.

Educational reforms in India, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, emphasize flexible, holistic, competency-based, and joyful learning environments. NEP 2020 envisions classrooms rich in activities, projects, discussions, and reflective tasks, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and lifelong learning. Similarly, the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) prepares educators to design learning environments that embrace experiential learning, inquiry, creativity, and higher-order cognitive skills. Together, these frameworks stress the importance of aligning teaching practices with the unique needs and strengths of contemporary learners, particularly Generation Z.

To address this evolving educational landscape, the integration of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) with Suchman's Inquiry Training Model (ITM) offers a structured, evidence-based instructional framework. ELC emphasizes learning through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, while ITM promotes systematic inquiry through guided questioning, hypothesis formulation, and evidence-based exploration. The combination of these models provides a holistic pathway that supports active engagement, conceptual clarity, critical thinking, and the application of knowledge in meaningful contexts.

The significance of this integrated approach lies in its ability to bridge theory and practice. It not only accommodates the learning preferences of Generation Z but also empowers teachers to implement pedagogically sound, competency-oriented, and student-centered instruction. By fostering curiosity-driven exploration, collaborative problem-solving, and reflective thinking, the integrated ELC–ITM model contributes to the development of higher-order cognitive skills, creativity, and lifelong learning habits. This framework, therefore, represents a forward-looking strategy to design classrooms that are engaging, future-ready, and fully aligned with the educational objectives outlined in NEP 2020.

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2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC)

Kolb's model describes learning as a dynamic cycle that involves:

1. Concrete Experience – engaging with an event, activity, or phenomenon directly.
2. Reflective Observation – thoughtfully examining what occurred and noticing patterns.
3. Abstract Conceptualization – generating new ideas, theories, or principles.
4. Active Experimentation – applying understanding in new contexts.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) offers several significant strengths that enhance student learning. It encourages creativity and imagination by engaging learners in active exploration and problem-solving, allowing them to approach concepts in innovative ways. ELC helps students develop a sense of ownership over their learning, fostering motivation, responsibility, and self-directed growth. By providing multiple pathways for diverse learning needs, the model accommodates varying learning styles, abilities, and interests, ensuring inclusivity. It also encourages students to interact both physically and mentally with content, promoting deeper engagement and meaningful understanding. Additionally, ELC connects classroom learning to real-life situations, reinforcing relevance and supporting the development of competencies emphasized in NEP 2020, such as critical thinking, experiential understanding, and practical application of knowledge.

2.2 Suchman's Inquiry Training Model (ITM)

ITM guides students through:

- observation,
- questioning,
- exploration,
- evidence analysis,
- explanation and communication.

Suchman's Inquiry Training Model (ITM) offers several notable strengths that enhance student learning. It encourages deep curiosity, motivating learners to explore concepts beyond surface-level understanding and fostering a genuine interest in discovery. ITM strengthens analytical and reasoning abilities by guiding students through structured inquiry, evidence evaluation, and problem-solving processes. The model also promotes collaborative thinking, as learners engage in discussion, share ideas, and work together to investigate questions. By providing a safe and structured environment for questioning, ITM enhances students' confidence in asking questions and expressing their thoughts. Furthermore, it aligns naturally with Generation Z learners' inherent tendencies toward exploration, experimentation, and discovery, making learning experiences both engaging and meaningful.

2.3 NEP 2020 strongly supports experiential and inquiry-based learning through the following official directives:

NEP 2020 Key Points Supported by the Model

- Learning should be holistic, integrated, enjoyable, and engaging.
- Emphasis on experiential learning, including arts-integrated and sports-integrated learning.
- Classrooms should encourage critical thinking and creativity.
- Pedagogy must be competency-based rather than content-heavy.
- Foundational stages must include play-based and activity-based learning.
- Use of local context, community experiences, and real-world tasks.
- Integration of multidisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches.
- Teachers should use technology-enhanced learning, digital tools, and simulations.

2.4 ITEP Alignment

ITEP prepares teachers to:

- design lively, activity-rich classrooms,
- conduct inquiry-driven lessons,
- integrate technology thoughtfully,
- encourage reflective teaching practices,
- promote holistic development of learners,
- use community and cultural contexts in teaching.

The ELC + ITM framework equips teachers with methods deeply aligned with these goals.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

1. To examine the learning characteristics, preferences, and strengths of Generation Z learners in contemporary classrooms.
2. To analyze the pedagogical principles of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) and Suchman's Inquiry Training Model (ITM) and their relevance to 21st-century education.

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3. To design an integrated instructional framework that combines ELC and ITM, aligned with NEP 2020 and ITEP guidelines, to foster experiential, inquiry-based, and competency-oriented learning.
4. To explore the applicability of the integrated framework across multiple subjects, including science, mathematics, social science, language education, and the arts.
5. To demonstrate how the framework promotes critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, reflective learning, and real-world problem-solving among students.
6. To provide teachers and teacher trainees with practical strategies, lesson designs, and assessment methods for implementing the integrated framework effectively in classrooms.
7. To evaluate the framework's effectiveness through classroom trials, student reflections, teacher narratives, and competency-based assessment tools.
8. To contribute to the discourse on modern pedagogical approaches that align national education policies with future-ready teaching and learning practices.

3. METHODOLOGY

The integrated ELC–ITM framework was developed through a systematic and multi-faceted process that combined theoretical, policy, and practical considerations. Initially, a theoretical synthesis of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) and Suchman's Inquiry Training Model (ITM) provided a strong conceptual foundation, ensuring that the framework incorporated both experience-driven learning and inquiry-based exploration. This theoretical base was further strengthened by aligning the framework with key policy directives, particularly India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) guidelines, ensuring relevance to contemporary educational standards and competency-based learning goals. To validate and refine the model in authentic classroom contexts, trials were conducted across multiple subjects, including science, mathematics, social science, language education, and the arts, allowing for diverse disciplinary applications. Student reflection journals were maintained throughout these trials to capture personal insights, experiences, and the impact of the instructional strategies on learning, while teacher narratives provided additional perspectives on opportunities, challenges, and pedagogical effectiveness.

The framework underwent iterative refinement based on these reflections, observations, and feedback, improving clarity, usability, and adaptability for varied classroom contexts. Additional investigative components further enhanced the rigor of the framework. Classroom videos and digital artifacts were reviewed to document engagement, interaction, and implementation fidelity, while rubrics for competency-based assessment were employed to evaluate learning outcomes systematically. Interdisciplinary lesson plans were incorporated to promote cross-curricular connections and holistic learning, and a detailed analysis of Generation Z learners' preferences ensured that the framework was responsive to contemporary student needs, including digital fluency, collaboration, and creativity. Collectively, these methodological steps ensured that the ELC–ITM framework is both theoretically robust and practically grounded, providing educators with a flexible, evidence-based approach to designing engaging, reflective, and competency-focused learning environments.

4. INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK WITH EXPANDED STRUCTURE

The integrated ELC–ITM framework follows a four-phase progression that supports experiential, inquiry-based, and competency-driven learning:

1) Phase 1: Experiential Engagement

a) Students participate in demonstrations, experiments, stories and narratives, field observations, role-plays, and digital simulations.
b) These activities are designed to immerse learners in concrete experiences, sparking curiosity and motivating exploration.
c) Alignment with NEP 2020 ensures that learning is joyful, hands-on, and grounded in local and real-world contexts, allowing students to make meaningful connections between classroom concepts and everyday life.
d) This phase also encourages physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement, helping learners form initial mental models and develop ownership of their learning process.

2) Phase 2: Inquiry and Reflective Exploration

a) Students are guided to ask thoughtful questions, share ideas collaboratively, make predictions, and reflect on observations both individually and in groups.
b) This phase cultivates reflective thinking and metacognition, enabling learners to evaluate their own understanding and identify gaps.
c) ITEP alignment emphasizes the teacher's role in facilitating inquiry, scaffolding learning, and creating a classroom culture where curiosity and questioning are valued.
d) By reflecting on experiences, learners deepen their conceptual understanding and develop critical thinking skills, laying the groundwork for independent problem-solving.

3) Phase 3: Investigation and Concept Formation

a) Learners analyze collected data, examine multiple sources of information, explore underlying concepts, test hypotheses, and develop theories.

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b) This phase encourages systematic thinking and logical reasoning, supporting NEP 2020's focus on critical thinking, competency-building, and multidisciplinary connections.
c) Students synthesize experiential observations with theoretical understanding, forming coherent conceptual frameworks that can guide future learning and decision-making.
d) Collaborative investigations in this phase enhance teamwork, analytical skills, and the ability to evaluate evidence objectively.

4) Phase 4: Application and Knowledge Transfer

a) Students apply their learning by creating products, designing solutions, preparing presentations, and linking knowledge to community or real-world problems.
b) ITEP integration encourages teachers to embed authentic, experiential assessments that evaluate both understanding and practical application.
c) This phase strengthens problem-solving, creativity, and decision-making skills while fostering social responsibility and community engagement.
d) Learners develop the ability to transfer knowledge across contexts, demonstrating higher-order thinking, self-directed learning, and lifelong learning habits.

Overall, the four-phase ELC–ITM framework provides a holistic and sequential approach to learning, ensuring that students move from concrete experiences to inquiry, conceptual understanding, and real-world application. It fosters curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and reflective learning, while aligning closely with NEP 2020's vision of competency-based, experiential, and multidisciplinary education and ITEP's objectives for preparing effective, inquiry-oriented teachers. This structured yet flexible approach equips educators to design future-ready classrooms where learning is active, meaningful, and inclusive.

5. TABLES FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING

Table 1
Alignment of ELC–ITM with NEP 2020

NEP 2020 Priority	How the Framework Supports It
Experiential Learning	Phase 1 and Phase 4 emphasize activities and real-life tasks
Inquiry-based Learning	Phase 2 and Phase 3 focus on questioning and exploration
Joyful Learning	Use of stories, demonstrations, hands-on tasks
Competency-focused Learning	Investigative and application stages reinforce mastery
Multidisciplinary Education	Integrates arts, STEM, humanities in projects
Technology Integration	Uses digital tools, simulations, and multimedia
Holistic Development	Encourages creativity, collaboration, and reflection

The integrated ELC–ITM framework aligns closely with the priorities of NEP 2020. Experiential learning is emphasized in Phases 1 and 4 through hands-on activities and real-life tasks, while inquiry-based learning is fostered in Phases 2 and 3, focusing on questioning, exploration, and reflective thinking. Joyful learning is promoted through the use of stories, demonstrations, and interactive, hands-on experiences. Competency-focused learning is reinforced during investigative and application stages, enabling students to master key concepts. The framework supports multidisciplinary education by integrating arts, STEM, and humanities into projects, and leverages technology through digital tools, simulations, and multimedia resources. Finally, it encourages holistic development by nurturing creativity, collaboration, and reflective practices, thereby preparing students for comprehensive, future-ready learning.

6. EXPANDED CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

The integrated ELC–ITM framework offers diverse and structured opportunities for experiential and inquiry-based learning across multiple subjects:

1. **STEM: Physics of Motion**

a. Experiential Activities: Students observe multiple objects in motion, measure velocity and acceleration, analyze graphs, explore sports applications, and use digital simulations such as PhET.
b. Application Tasks: Learners design simple rescue parachutes, create motion-based art compositions, and connect theoretical concepts of motion to real-life scenarios, enhancing conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills.

2. **Mathematics: Patterns and Proportions**

a. Experiential Entry: Students explore patterns found in nature, architectural designs, fabrics, and other visual forms.
b. Inquiry Stage: They ask questions like "Why does this pattern repeat?" or "What ratios are used?" to investigate underlying mathematical principles.
c. Investigation: Learners examine geometric sequences and identify proportional reasoning in art and crafts.

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d. Application: Students create rangoli patterns, design fractal-based artworks, or develop other creative projects that reinforce mathematical concepts.

3. **Environmental Science**

a. Experiential Activities: Students collect soil and water samples, map features of local ecosystems, and conduct interviews with community members to observe environmental dynamics.

b. Application: Learners design awareness campaigns, prepare conservation proposals, or suggest practical interventions, linking classroom knowledge to community and environmental contexts.

4. **Social Studies / Humanities**

a. Experiential Tasks: Students analyze photographs, historical speeches, letters, and use virtual reality (VR) tours to explore historical sites.

b. Inquiry Stage: They pose questions about culture, identity, and community life, investigating social and historical phenomena critically.

c. Application: Learners create digital story maps, design classroom museum exhibits, or develop multimedia projects to communicate insights and understanding

7. DISCUSSION

The integrated model demonstrated significant benefits for both students and teachers, highlighting its effectiveness as a comprehensive pedagogical approach. For students, the model fostered increased participation by actively engaging them in learning tasks and promoting a sense of ownership over their learning process. It enhanced confident communication by providing structured opportunities for expression, discussion, and presentation, which in turn strengthened interpersonal and language skills. Furthermore, the model promoted deeper conceptual clarity, allowing students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications, and encouraged joyful exploration, which cultivated curiosity and intrinsic motivation. Beyond individual skills, the approach nurtured collaboration and teamwork, enabling students to develop social and cooperative abilities essential for real-world problem-solving, while simultaneously fostering creativity and imagination, critical components of 21st-century learning.

Teachers, in turn, valued the model for its flexibility in lesson design, which allowed adaptation to diverse classroom contexts and learner needs. They also appreciated its alignment with the competencies emphasized in NEP 2020, particularly those related to critical thinking, experiential learning, and holistic development. Moreover, its integration with ITEP pedagogy supported teachers in implementing structured inquiry and reflective practices, enhancing both instructional effectiveness and student outcomes. Collectively, these outcomes indicate that the integrated model functions not merely as a set of strategies but as a holistic framework that strengthens student engagement, nurtures higher-order skills, and supports educators in delivering learner-centered, competency-based education. Its adoption can therefore contribute to long-term improvements in teaching quality, learning experiences, and overall educational effectiveness, reinforcing the principles of modern pedagogical reform initiatives.

8. LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES:

While the integrated ELC–ITM framework offers significant pedagogical benefits, certain challenges may arise during its implementation. One key limitation is **teacher readiness**, as educators may require specialized training to effectively facilitate experiential and inquiry-based learning while managing diverse classroom dynamics. **Time constraints** can also pose difficulties, particularly in curriculum-heavy environments where covering extensive content within limited instructional hours is expected. Additionally, implementing the framework in **large classrooms** may be challenging due to difficulties in providing individualized attention, monitoring collaborative activities, and ensuring active participation for all students. Access to **adequate resources and technology**, such as digital simulations, VR tools, and laboratory equipment, may further influence the feasibility of full-scale implementation. Recognizing these challenges is essential for planning supportive measures and ensuring successful adoption of the model.

9. FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the applicability and effectiveness of the ELC–ITM framework, several future directions can be considered. **Further research** could explore the long-term impact of the integrated model on student learning outcomes, creativity, and higher-order thinking across diverse educational contexts. **Technology integration** can be expanded, including the use of virtual and augmented reality, gamified learning, and online collaborative platforms to enrich experiential and inquiry-based activities. The framework can also be **adapted for hybrid or fully online learning environments**, ensuring accessibility and engagement even in remote or resource-constrained settings. Additionally, teacher professional development programs should emphasize strategies for managing diverse classrooms, scaffolding inquiry, and effectively using digital tools. Finally, **cross-disciplinary studies** may investigate the framework's effectiveness in fostering 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, innovation, and social-emotional development, further strengthening its role in contemporary education.

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10. CONCLUSION

The combined Experiential Learning and Inquiry Training Model provides a smooth, holistic pathway for learning that aligns closely with the aspirations of NEP 2020 and the preparation goals of ITEP. By integrating hands-on experiences with structured inquiry, the model creates an environment where students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in their learning journey. For Gen Z learners, who thrive in interactive, collaborative, and technology-enhanced environments, this framework nurtures curiosity, encourages creative thinking, develops deep conceptual understanding, and fosters the ability to apply knowledge to real-world challenges. Beyond academic learning, the model promotes essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration, ensuring that learners are equipped to navigate complex societal, environmental, and technological contexts. It also encourages reflection, self-directed learning, and lifelong learning habits, enabling students to continually adapt and grow in a rapidly changing world. For educators, the framework provides a clear, adaptable roadmap for designing lessons that are both engaging and meaningful. It supports the creation of competency-focused classrooms where assessment is authentic, integrated with learning, and aligned with real-world applications. By combining experiential activities with guided inquiry, teachers can foster classrooms that are inclusive, stimulating, and culturally responsive, thereby addressing diverse learner needs and strengths. This integrated model offers a transformative approach to education—one that aligns national policy objectives with contemporary pedagogical practices, prepares teachers to deliver high-quality, learner-centered instruction, and empowers students to become confident, creative, and capable individuals. It lays a strong foundation for lifelong learning and encourages a culture of inquiry, innovation, and meaningful engagement, positioning classrooms as vibrant spaces where learning is both joyful and purposeful.

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ENDURING RELEVANCE OF FOLKTALES IN MODERN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

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Abstract

In recent years, educators and researchers have expressed increasing concern over the declining attention span of students, particularly those belonging to Generation Z. The pervasive influence of digital media and information overload has made it challenging to maintain student engagement in traditional classroom settings. Simultaneously, studies indicate that Gen Z learners respond more effectively to teaching approaches that are interactive, relatable, and experiential.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines storytelling as a powerful pedagogical tool within commerce and management education. Storytelling has long been valued for its ability to capture attention, simplify complex concepts, and establish emotional and intellectual connections with learners. This study specifically explores the use of Indian folktales—particularly the Panchatantra—as effective means to communicate key management and commerce concepts. These culturally rooted stories, rich in moral and strategic insights, offer a memorable way to teach abstract theories.

The study involved 50 undergraduate students who participated in a series of storytelling-based sessions. The objective was to evaluate whether narrative-based instruction enhances conceptual understanding and long-term retention. Preliminary findings reveal that storytelling not only improves attentiveness but also strengthens recall and the practical application of management concepts.

Keywords: *Storytelling, Management Education, Gen Z Attention, Pedagogical Innovation, Panchatantra*

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, verbal communication has been the primary medium for transferring knowledge between tutors and learners. Folktales, a form of narrative storytelling, have played a crucial role in this process for generations. While fairy tales enchant learners with magical creatures and adventures, folktales, such as the tales of Panchatantra, Vikram Betal, Mahabharata, Jataka Tales, Tenali Rama etc. convey deeper moral lessons intended for adults. In today's management education, these ancient stories find relevance as they impart timeless wisdom applicable to modern organizational dynamics. This paper explores the significance of folktales in management education, drawing parallels between ancient narratives and contemporary managerial principles.

Education is not merely about transmitting information but also about instilling values and principles in learners. From an early age, children are introduced to complex concepts through storytelling, as narratives have a profound impact on shaping their understanding of the world. Folktales, characterized by their moral teachings and cultural significance, serve as invaluable tools in this educational process. In the context of management education, the timeless wisdom embedded in folktales provides insights into effective leadership, strategic management, teamwork, and ethical decision-making.

Incorporating folktales into management education fosters a holistic learning experience that transcends traditional pedagogical methods. By leveraging the power of storytelling, educators can captivate students' attention, stimulate their imagination, and impart enduring lessons on leadership, teamwork, and ethical decision-making. Moreover, experiential learning activities inspired by folktales, such as role-playing exercises and case studies, enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, thereby enhancing their problem-solving skills and decision-making abilities.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOLKTALES

For centuries, verbal communication has played a central role in the dissemination of knowledge. Among its many forms, folktales have held a special place, carrying cultural values and moral teachings across generations. While fairy tales often rely on fantasy and imagination, folktales—such as the Panchatantra, Vikram–Betal, Mahabharata narratives, Jataka tales, and Tenali Raman stories—provide profound ethical and strategic lessons intended for adults.

In the context of modern management education, these timeless narratives remain deeply relevant. Their themes—leadership, ethics, strategy, collaboration, and emotional intelligence—align closely with essential

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managerial principles. Storytelling continues to be one of the most effective educational techniques, offering students a holistic learning experience that extends beyond mere information transmission.

From childhood, stories shape our understanding of the world. Their emotional resonance and moral clarity make them powerful tools for teaching values, decision-making, and problem-solving. When incorporated into management curricula, folktales enhance engagement, stimulate imagination, and offer memorable illustrations of theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, integrating narrative-based activities such as role-plays and case studies enables learners to apply concepts to real-world scenarios, thereby deepening comprehension and fostering reflective thinking.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It becomes difficult day by day to teach complex management topics to learners who according to the latest report have hardly 8 seconds of attention span and require unique pedagogical methods to teach them topics even at undergraduate level. Modern management education struggles today to create leaders with ethical base, emotional maturity, moral judgement and strong technical background. The curricula developed today is weighing towards technical strength, analytical models and overlook important aspects like human centred approach that would foster wisdom, ethical background and culture.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Whether folktales from India attract the attention of learners from Gen Z?
2. Can Indian Folktales reduce the complexity of management topics for Gen Z?
3. Would Gen Z accept this novel idea of including Folktales in management education?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. Ch. Sarajubala Devi & Dr. Melissa Wallang mentioned children are naturally attracted to folktales because these stories align with their way of thinking for example they identify more with magical relationship or inanimate objects and animate objects having conversation than anything else.

In the paper of Kubra Melis, it is mentioned that the participation from the learners is achieved with the use of folklore in social education. This can be implied in terms of management education too.

Rosalih Kiting and Juni Dikul (2019) in their research paper mentioned that when folklore is used as instructional material, it must be organized in a more systematic and scholarly manner for classroom learning. Because folklore exists in many forms, efforts to document these works should be strengthened so they can serve as engaging reading materials for students.

Rocha, C. R. N. C., & Davel, E. P. B. (2023), in their paper reiterated that folklores can support management education in a positive manner.

Prof. Vinay K Y and Lt. Sowmya M A, in their paper emphasised that the folktales from Panchatantra were 'self-explanatory' and resulted into better understanding of management skills in management education.

Learning crisis management which is utmost important as a management concept becomes easier to learn with the Panchatantra as a tool for inculcating life skills and crisis management.

PARALLELS OF FOLKTALES WITH MODERN MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS

Despite cultural and temporal distance, folktales often mirror key managerial principles. The Panchatantra's five strategies—creating and losing friendships, understanding enemies, evaluating risks, and avoiding imprudence—correspond closely to modern concepts such as:

- Team building and collaboration
- Networking and relationship management
- Conflict resolution and negotiation
- Risk assessment and decision-making
- Strategic thinking and leadership

Folktales simplify complex management theories, making them accessible and relatable. Their narrative form helps students visualize problems, analyze decisions, and interpret outcomes, providing a strong foundation for managerial reasoning.

In recent years, the renewed interest in India's indigenous knowledge systems has further highlighted the academic value of folktales. These narratives offer culturally rooted, engaging, and intellectually stimulating methods for teaching management concepts.

Illustrative Examples

The relevance of folktales becomes especially evident when they are used to explain abstract or challenging concepts. For instance, consider the well-known story of the woodcutter and the golden axe, which can be used to illustrate inflation and ethical behavior under shifting incentives. While the plot focuses on honesty, it indirectly highlights how external rewards can influence decision-making—an important aspect of behavioral economics.

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Similarly, stories from the Mahabharata and Panchatantra provide rich examples for explaining:

- Vision and mission development
- SWOT and PESTLE analyses
- Resource-based strategy
- Leadership styles
- Ethical dilemmas in organizational behavior

The Tenali Raman and the weak horse story is particularly effective in explaining motivation. By creating competition for the weak horse, Raman demonstrates how the right environment can inspire performance—a core principle in employee motivation theories.

SESSIONS WITH LEARNERS

A structured series of sessions was conducted to assess the effectiveness of using folktales in teaching management concepts. A group of 25 learners voluntarily participated in the programme. Prior to each session, students were given a Google Form containing a short quiz to gauge their existing understanding of the topic. After the session, a second quiz was administered to measure improvement in comprehension.

A total of 10 sessions were conducted, each covering a distinct management concept illustrated through an Indian folktale. By the end of the programme, learners had effectively grasped 10–12 management concepts—including leadership, ethics, motivation, strategic planning, and risk assessment—through the engaging medium of storytelling.

In the end of these sessions, feedback was taken from these learners and a positive response was received. Some learners were of the opinion that a separate subject need to be introduced in curricula so that learners remain engaged during the sessions.

CONCLUSION

In an educational era marked by distraction and digital saturation, the integration of folktales into management teaching offers a refreshing and highly effective pedagogical strategy. These ancient narratives hold enduring wisdom that enriches learners' understanding of leadership, ethics, teamwork, and decision-making. By tapping into the cultural heritage of storytelling, educators can create immersive learning experiences that promote critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and values-based leadership.

As management education continues to evolve, folktales stand as powerful, timeless tools that illuminate the complexities of human behavior and organizational life. Their blend of simplicity, depth, and cultural richness ensures their relevance in shaping thoughtful, responsible, and effective future leaders.

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Note: #8 and #10 were duplicates; listed once.

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LIFE SKILLS: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is one of the most powerful forces driving innovation, employment, and economic growth in the modern world. However, success in entrepreneurship requires more than just technical or business knowledge—it demands strong life skills. Life skills such as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence enable individuals to face challenges, take calculated risks, and lead effectively. This paper explores the relationship between entrepreneurship and life skills, emphasizing how these competencies support innovation, resilience, and long-term success. The study concludes that developing life skills alongside entrepreneurship education is essential for nurturing capable, confident, and ethical entrepreneurs.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth, innovation, and job creation. It is not merely about starting a business but also about developing a mindset that embraces creativity, risk-taking, and leadership. On the other hand, life skills are psychosocial abilities that enable individuals to effectively manage the demands and challenges of everyday life. These include skills such as problem-solving, communication, interpersonal relationships, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. Integrating entrepreneurship with life skills education fosters holistic development and prepares individuals to navigate complex social and economic environments. The synergy between these two domains can help youth not only become job creators but also resilient, responsible, and proactive citizens.

Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in shaping the economy and society. Entrepreneurs are the creators of new ideas, businesses, and opportunities. They transform challenges into possibilities and contribute to employment generation, technological advancement, and community development. However, the journey of an entrepreneur is full of uncertainty and risk, requiring not just technical knowledge but also the right mindset and personal abilities.

Life skills are the foundation of this mindset. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines life skills as "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." These include ten core skills such as self-awareness, empathy, communication, interpersonal relationships, creative and critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, coping with stress, and coping with emotions.

For entrepreneurs, these life skills are essential. They help in decision-making, managing relationships, handling failures, and adapting to change. Entrepreneurship without life skills is incomplete because life skills shape personality, character, and leadership qualities that drive long-term success.

This paper aims to understand the connection between entrepreneurship and life skills and to highlight how the development of these skills leads to personal and professional growth.

2. KNOWLEDGE / DISCUSSION

2.1 Understanding Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is more than starting a business—it is the ability to identify opportunities, take risks, and bring ideas to life. An entrepreneur is a problem-solver, innovator, and leader. Famous economists like Joseph Schumpeter described entrepreneurs as "agents of innovation" who bring about economic change through creative destruction. Similarly, Peter Drucker emphasized that entrepreneurship is about innovation and discipline rather than luck or risk-taking alone.

2.2 Understanding Life Skills

Life skills are psychological and social abilities that help individuals make informed decisions, communicate effectively, build relationships, and manage challenges. The ten life skills recommended by WHO can be grouped into three main areas:

1. Thinking Skills: Creative thinking, critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving.
2. Social Skills: Communication, empathy, and interpersonal relationships.
3. Emotional Skills: Self-awareness, coping with stress, and coping with emotions.

These skills help people lead balanced and productive lives in personal, professional, and social contexts.

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3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To understand the relationship between entrepreneurship and life skills development.
2. To analyze how life skills contribute to entrepreneurial success.
3. To assess the role of education and training programs in fostering entrepreneurial and life skills among youth.
4. To suggest strategies for integrating life skills into entrepreneurship education.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How do life skills influence entrepreneurial success and sustainability?
2. What is the role of educational institutions in developing both entrepreneurship and life skills?
3. Which life skills are most critical for successful entrepreneurship?
4. How can entrepreneurship education be structured to enhance life skill development among youth?

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE (BRIEF):

- Gibb (2002) emphasized that entrepreneurship education develops initiative, independence, and creativity.
- UNESCO (2015) identified life skills as essential for quality education and lifelong learning.
- OECD (2018) reported that life skills such as problem-solving and communication improve employability and innovation potential.
- World Economic Forum (2020) highlighted that future jobs will increasingly require entrepreneurial thinking and social-emotional intelligence.
- Singh & Sharma (2021) found that students who undergo life skills training perform better in leadership and self-management.

These studies collectively suggest that entrepreneurship and life skills are interdependent and vital for sustainable human development.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Research Design: Descriptive and analytical.
Type of Study: Qualitative and quantitative (mixed-method).
Data Collection Methods:

- Primary Data: Surveys and interviews with students, educators, and entrepreneurs.
- Secondary Data: Journals, government reports, and academic articles on entrepreneurship and life skills.

Sample Size: 100 respondents (50 students, 30 teachers, and 20 small business owners).
Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling.
Data Analysis: Data interpreted through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.
Tools Used: Questionnaire, Likert scale for attitude measurement.

7.1 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LIFE SKILLS

Entrepreneurship and life skills are deeply interconnected. Successful entrepreneurs often demonstrate strong life skills that help them navigate the uncertainties of business life. For example:
Communication: Entrepreneurs must communicate ideas clearly to investors, employees, and customers.
Decision-making: Every business decision involves risk; effective decision-making helps minimize loss and maximize opportunity.
Problem-solving: Entrepreneurs face constant challenges; problem-solving skills enable them to find creative solutions.
Leadership and teamwork: Managing a team and motivating people toward a common goal are key aspects of entrepreneurship.
Emotional intelligence: Understanding emotions—both their own and others'—helps entrepreneurs maintain positive relationships and manage stress.
Resilience: Entrepreneurship involves failure; resilience helps entrepreneurs recover and learn from setbacks.

7.2 IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP ENHANCES CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION: LIFE SKILLS LIKE CREATIVE THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING LEAD TO NEW IDEAS AND INNOVATIVE BUSINESS SOLUTIONS.

Builds Confidence: Self-awareness and communication skills help entrepreneurs believe in their vision and express it effectively.

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Improves Decision-Making: Critical thinking allows entrepreneurs to analyze situations objectively and make smart choices.
Develops Leadership: Interpersonal skills and empathy strengthen leadership and team management.
Encourages Ethical Behavior: Life skills promote integrity and responsibility in business practices.

7.3 LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Educational institutions should include life skills training as part of entrepreneurship programs. Activities such as group discussions, role plays, business simulations, and real-life projects can develop these skills. Mentorship and internships also help students experience real-world entrepreneurial challenges and apply their life skills effectively.

8. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS:

The findings reveal that:

- 82% of respondents believe life skills training improves entrepreneurial performance.
- Communication and decision-making skills are seen as the most valuable for entrepreneurs.
- Institutions that integrate entrepreneurship with life skills training report higher student motivation and creativity.
- Respondents highlighted that emotional resilience and adaptability are crucial in dealing with business challenges.

Overall, the data indicate that entrepreneurship education must be holistic, blending technical knowledge with social-emotional skills.

9. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship and life skills go hand in hand. While entrepreneurship provides a platform for innovation and growth, life skills form the backbone of an entrepreneur's character, mindset, and success. A person with strong life skills can communicate effectively, make sound decisions, solve problems creatively, and adapt to challenges confidently.
Therefore, integrating life skills education into entrepreneurship training is essential. It not only helps in building successful entrepreneurs but also responsible citizens who contribute positively to society. Developing these skills among youth will create a new generation of leaders who are capable, compassionate, and ready to shape a better future.
Entrepreneurship and life skills are complementary forces that shape an individual's personal and professional growth. While entrepreneurship provides the framework for innovation and economic progress, life skills ensure emotional balance, ethical decision-making, and effective communication. The integration of these skills in education systems can produce self-reliant, capable, and socially responsible individuals. Governments, educational institutions, and NGOs should collaborate to design programs that cultivate both entrepreneurial and life skills from an early stage to build a sustainable future workforce.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Introduce compulsory entrepreneurship and life skills courses in school and college curricula.
2. Conduct practical workshops, simulations, and internships to enhance real-world exposure.
3. Encourage mentorship programs linking students with successful entrepreneurs.
4. Include gender-inclusive and culturally sensitive training approaches.
5. Regularly assess the impact of life skills and entrepreneurship programs.

8. Recommendations:

1. Introduce compulsory entrepreneurship and life skills courses in school and college curricula.
2. Conduct practical workshops, simulations, and internships to enhance real-world exposure.
3. Encourage mentorship programs linking students with successful entrepreneurs.
4. Include gender-inclusive and culturally sensitive training approaches.
5. Regularly assess the impact of life skills and entrepreneurship programs.

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BEYOND CHALK AND TALK: INNOVATIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR DIGITAL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study explores fresh approaches to teaching digital-age students. It brings together classic classroom methods with technology, interactive elements, gamification, and hands-on learning. Ninety-one undergraduates took part, and their feedback is pretty direct: they learn best when digital tools and interactive activities work together, not when classes stick to old-school lectures. Students singled out PowerPoint, smart boards, group discussions, and project-based work as their top picks these methods make learning feel lively and relevant. The data backs this up. When you mix traditional and modern techniques, students engage more, stay motivated, understand the material better, and feel better emotionally. The takeaway? There's a real need for a solid Digital Pedagogy Integration Model. It should put students at the center, support different ways of learning, and fit the demands of today's digital education.

Keywords: *Digital learners, Innovative teaching strategies, Gamification, Experiential learning, Student-cantered pedagogy, Technology-enhanced learning*

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology moves fast, and students' expectations change just as quickly. These days, learners grow up surrounded by instant, visual, and interactive information. They're always on their phones, laptops, and social media, watching videos, playing games, or searching online. Because of all this, the way students learn isn't what it used to be. Instead of quietly soaking up information, they want to explore, ask questions, work together, and dive into content that actually grabs them. They expect quick answers, lively discussions, and learning that feels more like a conversation than a lecture.

Old-school teaching the classic chalk-and-talk still has its place. It gives structure, keeps things organized, and helps students follow the flow of ideas. Many teachers stick with it because it's straightforward, doesn't cost much, and lets them guide the classroom. But let's be honest: it doesn't always keep students engaged anymore. In a world shaped by fast-scrolling feeds and nonstop notifications, long lectures and endless note-taking just don't cut it. Students who are used to bright visuals, quick demos, and instant feedback zone out fast when things get too slow or static.

This gap between how we teach and how students want to learn is only getting wider. So, the classroom has to change. Students today want learning that feels active and real, something that actually connects to their lives. They learn best when they're doing, not just listening. That's exactly why modern teaching is heading toward methods that use technology, creativity, teamwork, and hands-on experience.

This study digs into some fresh strategies that mix tech, interactivity, and real-world experience. Think smart boards, videos, games, group discussions, projects, and activities that get students moving and thinking. These approaches don't just turn students into passive note-takers they get students to visualize ideas, use what they know in real situations, work with others, and build real problem-solving skills.

Technology in the classroom also brings flexibility and makes things more inclusive. Videos, animations, simulations, and digital quizzes work for all kinds of learners visual, auditory, hands-on, you name it. They let students go back and review things on their own time, so everyone keeps up. And interactive stuff like discussions and quizzes keeps students involved, giving them a reason to speak up and stay interested.

On top of that, real-world learning makes a huge difference. When students dive into projects, case studies, field trips, or hands-on activities, suddenly what they're learning feels useful. They get why it matters, which means they remember it better, think more deeply, and actually care about the subject.

In the end, these modern teaching strategies aren't just about keeping up with the times hey actually help students get more out of their education. By blending the best of traditional teaching with the power of digital tools and interactive methods, teachers can build classrooms where students feel engaged, challenged, and ready for the real world. That's what today's digital generation needs.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

For years, the message from educational research has been pretty blunt: teaching needs to change. Lectures on their own just aren't enough for students today. They want classes that do more something interactive, something that lets them get their hands dirty. Traditional lectures aren't useless, but students crave, and frankly need, more engagement. That's why flipped classrooms and gamification keep coming up in the research they actually work. These methods pull students in, spark motivation, and help them grasp complex topics (Fernández-Velásquez, López-Regalado & Fernández-Hurtado, 2025). Large-scale studies show that in flipped classrooms, students spend their time wrestling with ideas, talking things through, and working together on problems. That shift from passive listening to active doing leads to higher grades and deeper learning (Flipped Classroom Meta-analysis, 2019). Students often feel more confident and less lost, too, since they can go over online material at their own pace before jumping into class discussions.

Look at STEM fields or higher education. Gamification points, challenges, leaderboards actually makes students pay attention. It draws them into the process, and the data supports this: participation and performance go up (Ortiz-Rojas et al., 2025). Mixing flipped classrooms with project-based or hands-on work keeps students involved and curious, pushing them to explore topics more fully (Author(s), 202x). Even in healthcare education, which is notoriously demanding, combining flipped classrooms with team-based learning delivers results. Students develop stronger understanding, better problem-solving, and are more satisfied with their courses (Kang & Kim, 2021). Collaboration grows, and that's not just a bonus it's a must-have in today's professional world.

Of course, none of these methods are magic bullets. Their success depends on what students already know, how comfortable they are with tech, and how well courses are set up (Author(s), 2023). Still, the core message stands: when teachers blend technology, teamwork, and real-world tasks into their courses, students connect more and the learning lasts. The evidence is piling up for blended, flexible teaching a mix of tradition and innovation that actually gets results. Across the research, the call is clear: education needs to evolve, not just for novelty, but to match the way today's students think, interact, and learn.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We wanted to see how undergraduates actually deal with both old-school and digital teaching in their daily studies. So, we put together a thorough survey on Google Forms and got responses from 100 students. After tossing out the surveys that weren't finished or didn't make sense, we ended up with 91 solid responses. We crunched the numbers averages, percentages, frequency distributions and started to see some real trends in what students like, how they learn, and how much they depend on digital tools. The results show that interactive, tech-driven teaching doesn't just change the classroom vibe; it shapes how engaged and motivated students feel, how much they actually understand, and their overall success.

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

From 91 undergraduates, the responses reveal students eager for richer learning experiences. The trend is clear: learners are moving beyond passive lectures, seeking interactive, technology-enhanced, and hands-on, experience-driven approaches that actively engage them and deepen understanding.

Student Perception of Traditional Methods

- **Chalk-and-Talk -** The classic chalk-and-talk approach received an average score of 3.02, signalling moderate approval but also highlighting its limitations. Students acknowledged its strengths particularly structure, clarity, and ease of following step-by-step explanations. However, only 13.2% rated it at the highest level. Many commented that while this method is helpful for basic understanding, it does not capture attention for long or stimulate deeper interest. This aligns with broader research showing that traditional lecturing no longer matches the learning styles of digital-native students, who expect dynamism rather than long monologues.
- **PowerPoint Presentations -** PowerPoint presentations performed significantly better, earning an average score of 3.90. Students appreciated the visual elements, charts, images, and organized bullet points that help break down complex concepts. The combination of text and visuals makes content easier to recall, and even this relatively simple technological enhancement noticeably improves engagement. This indicates that students respond positively when teachers take steps to modernize their delivery.

Technology-Based Teaching: A Strong Preference

- **Smart Boards and Videos -** Smart boards, YouTube videos, animations, and other multimedia tools stood out with a high average rating of 4.20. Students noted that visual demonstrations and animated explanations make topics easier to grasp, especially in subjects where static diagrams fall short. Digital natives are accustomed to learning visually through reels, explainer videos, and online tutorials so incorporating similar elements in classrooms aligns teaching with their cognitive preferences.

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INTERACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

- **Group Discussions -** Group discussions received a positive score of 3.67. Students enjoy opportunities to communicate, debate, and exchange ideas with peers. The data suggests that they value a more democratic classroom where everyone participates rather than a one-way lecture format.
- **Case Studies -** Case studies scored 3.58, slightly lower but still favourable. Students appreciate real-world examples but often require more guidance to analyse and interpret them effectively. This indicates the need for structured facilitation while using case-based learning.
- **Project- and Activity-Based Learning -** Project-based learning scored 3.74, while activity-based learning scored a strong 4.03. These methods keep students actively involved, help them apply concepts, and enhance their sense of relevance. Hands-on tasks clearly resonate with learners who prefer doing rather than only listening.
- **Games and Quizzes -** Games and quizzes topped all methods with an impressive average of 4.37. Elements of competition, immediate feedback, and fun significantly boost motivation. Tools like Kahoot, quizzes, or classroom games create energy and excitement, resulting in higher participation.

Experiential and Holistic Approaches

- **Experiential Learning -** Experiential learning such as field visits, industrial exposure, or real-life observations earned a high score of 4.22. Students retain content better when they connect theory with actual experiences.
- **Value-Based and Mindful Learning -** Value-based learning scored 3.80, reflecting students' recognition that education should shape character and ethics. Mindful and nature-based practices scored 4.14, showing that students appreciate stress-relief activities that support emotional well-being.

Students' Learning Styles

The responses clearly show that students do not rely on a single method to learn; instead, they prefer a blend of different learning styles. A majority of students identified visual learning as their dominant approach, with 55 students (60.4%) expressing that they learn best through images, videos, and visual aids. Writing and note-taking were also highly preferred, with 47 students (51.6%) indicating that they understand concepts better when they write things down. Reading (35.2%) and auditory learning (36.3%) showed moderate preference, suggesting that while these methods are helpful, they are not the primary choices for most learners. Kinesthetic learning, involving hands-on activities, was selected by 27 students (29.7%), reflecting that a significant portion benefits from practical engagement. Overall, the strong inclination toward visual and writing-based strategies aligns with students' positive responses to PPTs, videos, activities, and games. These findings highlight that today's learners favour a multimodal approach, where multiple senses and learning experiences come together to deepen understanding.

Preferred Mode for Reading Material

When asked about their preferred mode of accessing reading material, most students expressed a desire for flexibility. A large majority, 73.6%, preferred using both online and offline resources, indicating that they value the convenience of digital material while still appreciating the familiarity and comfort of printed books. Meanwhile, 16.5% of students preferred exclusively offline resources, suggesting that a traditional reading experience still holds importance for some. Only 9.9% chose online material alone, showing that while digital learning is popular, students do not want it to completely replace physical books. Overall, these responses highlight that a blended model combining digital and print resources best supports the reading habits and learning comfort of the students.

Understanding Concepts in Class

Most students reported that they understand classroom concepts fairly well. Nearly 78% selected ratings of 4 or 5, suggesting that teaching inside the classroom is effective but can be strengthened further with digital tools and interactive strategies. The responses indicate that while traditional explanations work, students benefit even more when teachers incorporate multimedia resources, real-life examples, and opportunities for active participation. This blend not only improves clarity but also keeps students motivated and engaged throughout the lesson.

Use of Online Material

Online resources play a significant role in students' study routines. Around 62% frequently use YouTube, Google, educational websites, and digital notes to reinforce classroom learning. This highlights students' proactive approach they seek additional explanations, visual aids, and diverse perspectives beyond lectures. They use digital content for revision, doubt clarification, practical examples, self-paced practice, and deeper conceptual understanding, showing a strong shift toward independent, technology-supported learning.

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SUGGESTIONS

The study "Beyond Chalk and Talk" makes it clear: digital learners do best when you mix classic teaching with interactive, tech-based, and hands-on methods. That's the whole point behind the Digital Pedagogy Integration Model, or DPIM. It's a straightforward, usable framework for educators who want to boost engagement, understanding, and motivation in higher education. DPIM puts students at the heart of the classroom and adapts to different learning styles, so teaching stays dynamic, inclusive, and flexible.

1. Foundation Layer – Structured Traditional Teaching
Traditional teaching still matters. Lectures, chalk-and-talk they give students clarity and a step-by-step guide through complex ideas. DPIM uses these methods to lay the groundwork: introduce core concepts, break down theories, offer structure. But keep it short. Lectures should last no more than 15–20 minutes to hold attention and make space for digital tools.

2. Technology Layer – Visual and Multimedia Enhancement
Digital tools make learning stick. Think PowerPoint slides, animations, smart boards, educational videos all of these help bring abstract ideas to life and reach visual or auditory learners. DPIM urges teachers to offer recordings and online simulations so students can revisit lessons on their own time. This layer also includes digital quizzes, polls, and gamified tests for instant feedback, stronger recall, and extra motivation.

3. Interaction Layer – Collaborative and Reflective Learning
Active learning changes everything. Group discussions, peer reviews, case studies these are the backbone here. DPIM pushes for students to debate, solve problems, and build knowledge together, all with a teacher guiding the process. Reflection journals and online boards get students thinking deeper, encouraging self-paced exploration and metacognition. Here, teachers guide, ask open-ended questions, and keep the conversation open and diverse.

4. Experiential Layer – Hands-on and Real-World Application
Learning needs to get real. DPIM leans on projects, field trips, lab simulations, industry exposure, and real-world problem-solving. It's about closing the gap between theory and practice. Kinesthetic learners thrive here, and everyone gets to build skills like creativity, teamwork, and resilience. Value-based assignments and mindfulness activities matter too they support students' emotional health and remind us that education is about the whole person.

5. Blended Flexibility Layer – Student-Centric Adaptability
DPIM doesn't force students into a mold. Learners get to access material in the way that works for them online, offline, different formats, different activities. Teachers keep an eye on engagement and outcomes, adjusting pacing and content as needed. It's responsive teaching, not one-size-fits-all.

Implementation in Practice
A typical DPIM lesson kicks off with a focused lecture, backed by visuals or video. Then, students jump into group activities or case discussions. Quizzes and games check understanding right away. Projects and experiential tasks tie learning to the real world. Reflection exercises and digital resources let students move at their own pace, creating an ongoing, adaptable learning process.

DPIM blends traditional, digital, interactive, and hands-on learning into one holistic, student-first approach. It meets both the cognitive and emotional needs of today's learners, keeps them engaged, deepens understanding, and gets them ready for lifelong learning in a world that never stops changing.

CONCLUSION

This study makes one thing clear: sticking to old-school chalk-and-talk teaching just doesn't cut it for today's digital natives. Undergraduates light up when educators mix things up blending tech, interactivity, teamwork, and lessons rooted in real life. They respond well to visual aids, smart boards, videos, gamified quizzes, project-based work, and experiences that pull them out of their seats and into active learning. Sure, traditional methods still matter they keep things organized and clear but on their own, they fall short for students who expect more than lectures and notes.

The research shows students want flexibility. They thrive when they can learn in ways that suit them whether that's seeing, hearing, moving, reading, or writing. They want chances to reflect, talk things through, and get their hands dirty with real tasks. In the end, this study backs the need for a Digital Pedagogy Integration Model. Bring together the strengths of both classic and modern teaching. Create space for real participation. That's how we help students build skills and curiosity that last, long after they leave the classroom.

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CULTIVATING RESPONSIBLE DIGITAL CITIZENS: INTEGRATING CYBER ETHICS AND ONLINE SAFETY IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The exponential integration of digital technology into education has significantly designed student's lives, transforming classrooms, curricula, and communication. However, the same digital platforms that empower learning and innovation have also exposed students to new risks, including cyberbullying, privacy violations, online scams, and misinformation. While awareness about these challenges is essential, an actionable approach-one that instills cyber ethics and safe digital practices in students-is critical for developing responsible digital citizens. This paper examines the urgent need for, the core elements of, and the strategies behind effective cyber ethics education, drawing from theoretical and empirical research. It proposes a multidimensional approach, integrating curricular innovations, real-world scenarios, participatory pedagogy, and a focus on digital citizenship, to bridge the gap between awareness and ethical action in the online realm.

Keywords: *Digital Citizenship, Cyber Ethics, Online Safety, Ethical Decision-Making, Technological Advancements*

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, technology has become an integral part of our lives, shaping the way we communicate, learn, and interact with the world. With this advancement, it is essential to educate the younger generation about responsible digital citizenship. Value education provides a framework to implant ethical values and principles, enabling students to make informed decisions and act responsibly in the digital realm.

In today's digital age, the way students learn and connect with others has changed completely. Technology has made it easier than ever to access information, learn at our own pace, and work together from anywhere. But along with these benefits there are some serious challenges also. Students now face issues like plagiarism, loss of privacy, internet addiction, identity theft, and increasing cases of Cyberbullying. Cyber threats have also become more common and more advanced and just spreading awareness is just not enough. Students need to truly understand digital ethics and put that understanding into practice so that they can stay safe and behave responsibly online.

As schools and universities move toward more digitalize their works, the real challenge is no longer just using new technology-it's shaping students into responsible digital citizens. These citizens need more than technical skills, they need good judgment, strong values, and the ability to handle the ethical problems that come with living online. Teaching students about cyber ethics and safe digital behavior is essential nowadays. It helps reduce cybercrime, protects people's rights, and preserves the trust that keeps our digital world running.

IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In today's hyper connected world, the concept of digital citizenship transcends basic technological literacy. It embodies a comprehensive understanding of the ethical, legal, and social dimensions of digital participation. Digital citizenship equips individuals with the knowledge and values needed to use technology responsibly, engage respectfully in online discourse, and critically evaluate digital content. As societies increasingly rely on digital infrastructure for communication, governance, and education, the ability to act as a responsible digital citizen has become a prerequisite for meaningful civic engagement and personal security. Embedding these competencies into the educational experience ensures that young people not only function within digital spaces but contribute positively to them, fostering a culture rooted in empathy, integrity, and accountability.

By fostering digital citizenship and promoting ethical behavior, we can empower children to use technology responsibly and effectively, thereby ensuring their safety and well-being in the digital age. Digital citizenship can be defined as the ability to use technology and the internet responsibly, ethically, and effectively. It is a broad concept that encompasses knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for positive engagement in the digital world. The core pillars of digital citizenship are as following:

2.1. Digital Literacy: Digital literacy involves understanding how to use technology effectively and critically in order to evaluate online information. It includes the ability to identify credible sources, discern fake news, and analyze digital content. A digitally literate individual can navigate the complexities of the internet and leverage technology for constructive purposes.

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2.2 Digital Etiquette: This component focuses on appropriate and respectful behavior in online interactions. This involves understanding the norms of communication, avoiding harmful language or actions, and treating others with empathy and kindness in digital space.

2.3 Digital Rights and Responsibilities: Digital citizenship highlights the importance of knowing one's rights, such as freedom of expression and privacy, while recognizing the responsibility to respect others' rights. These include avoiding plagiarism, respecting intellectual property, and adhering to legal and ethical guidelines.

2.4 Digital Communication: This explains that the effective and ethical use of communication tools i.e., email, social media, and messaging platforms. Digital communication emphasizes clarity, respect, and accountability in expressing opinions and engaging with others online.

2.5 Digital Security: Protecting personal information and maintaining privacy are crucial parts of digital citizenship. This involves using strong passwords, avoiding scams, and understanding cybersecurity practices to ensure online safety.

2.6 Digital Health and Wellness: This component addresses the need for a balanced and healthy relationship with the technology. This includes managing screen time, avoiding digital addiction, and ensuring physical and mental well-being in technology-driven environment.

Digital citizenship is vital for preparing children to thrive in an increasingly connected world. It helps them develop critical thinking skills, ethical decision making, and an understanding of the impact of their digital footprints. Teaching digital citizenship ensures that children can responsibly engage with technology while protecting themselves and others from potential online risks. It promotes a digital culture of respect, inclusiveness, and empathy in interactions with young people so that they can contribute positively to the digital environment. Moreover, digital citizenship contributes to the understanding of accountability within children so that they can use it constructively, such as innovation, learning, or social impact Society can guarantee children's safety and well-being in a technologically advanced age by incorporating digital citizenship education into schools and homes. This will give them the skills they need to successfully and morally negotiate the intricacies of the digital world

THE CHANGING WORLD OF CYBER RISKS AND DIGITAL ETHICS

While technology brings many benefits, it also opens the door to misuse and harmful online behavior. Today students face several major types of risks, including:

- **Information Security Risks:** These include malware, identity theft, phishing, and data breaches, threatening personal and institutional information.
- **Personal and Social Risks:** Compulsive technology use, cyberbullying, social withdrawal, and exposure to inappropriate content affect students' well-being.
- **Intellectual Property and Academic Integrity:** Digital tools increase access to knowledge, but also plagiarism, contract cheating, and academic fraud, challenging the foundational ethics of learning communities.
- **Legal and Social Risks:** Students may unwittingly violate copyright, privacy, or defamation laws through file sharing, careless posting, or misinformed social media engagement.

In this situation, it's clear that simple warnings are not enough. Many online ethical issues require thoughtful judgment, not just blindly following rules.

UNDERSTANDING CYBER ETHICS AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Cyber ethics is a part of applied ethics that deals with the moral, legal, and social questions that occur when people interact with digital technology. It focuses on understanding what is right and wrong in online spaces, including issues like privacy, intellectual property, respect for others, fairness and responsible behavior. As today's young people grow up as 'digital natives,' it becomes important for educators to help them understand not only the power of technology but also the responsibilities that come with using it.

Key motivations for emphasizing cyber ethics and safe online practices include:

- Minimizing cybercrime and unethical conduct by providing clear behavioral guidelines.
- Introducing students to both the social norms that strengthen responsible online behavior and the specific laws and policies that regulate digital interactions.
- Enhancing students' decision-making skills to navigate and resolve ethical dilemmas online, whether encountered as consumers, creators, or spectators.

Ultimately, cyber ethics education is not just about preventing harm but about fostering character, empathy, and public engagement in online environments.

BEST PRACTICES IN CYBER ETHICS EDUCATION

Research and curriculum frameworks highlight several key elements that make digital ethics education effective:

5.1 Clear Objectives and Realistic Content

Cyber ethics programs should clearly outline what students are expected to learn—for example, understanding privacy, identifying plagiarism, or knowing how to respond to cyber harassment. The material should be up-to-date, culturally relevant, and based on both legal requirements and social expectations.

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5.2 Learning through Participation and Real Experiences

Students understand ethical behavior best when they can experience situations personally and reflect on them. Interactive activities-such as role-plays, simulations, debates, and case studies will help them deal with real-life ethical challenges and get training for making responsible choices. Teachers should create a classroom environment where students feel safe to discuss incidents, share mistakes, and learn from them in a positive way.

5.3 Case Studies and Ethical Frameworks

Embedding real-life case studies into the curriculum deepens understanding. For example, discussing the use of AI-generated essays, exploring responses to online bullying, or analyzing breaches of privacy can help students identify the real-world impact of digital choices.

5.4 Digital Citizenship and Rights Literacy

A major objective is to prepare students for active, thoughtful engagement online—not just as users, but as creators, critics, and contributors. This involves:

- Teaching students their digital rights (such as privacy) and responsibilities (such as respecting others' rights).
- Fostering empathy, respect for diversity, and the ability to recognize and challenge injustice or abuse online.

5.5 Multidisciplinary Collaboration

No teacher or school can address cyber ethics in isolation. Cooperation between schools, IT professionals, law enforcement, and parents ensures students are exposed to up-to-date risks, regulations, and solutions.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING ETHICAL ACTION

How can educators translate these principles into practical initiatives? The following approaches have demonstrated effectiveness:

6.1 Adding Digital Ethics to the Main Curriculum as well as Supporting Courses

Digital ethics should be included across different subjects instead of being taught in just one chapter. For example, in language classes students can learn about plagiarism and proper referencing, in social studies they can understand how viral misinformation affects the public, and in science or IT-related courses they can discuss ethical issues like data sharing and privacy. This helps students see how digital ethics applies to real situations in every field.

6.2 Role Modeling and Teacher Training

Teachers need to set a good example by using digital platforms responsibly and be ready to guide students when issues arise. They should receive proper training in digital citizenship and keep updating their skills. Colleges should also give teachers the authority to set clear online behavior rules in class and step in effectively when any kind of online misconduct happens.

6.3 Real-time Feedback and Insightful Practices

Students should get proper feedback when they make mistakes online and should also get a chance to think about what went wrong. Activities like maintaining digital journals, creating classroom digital conduct rules or forming peer review or mediation groups can help students build self-awareness and take responsibility for their online actions.

6.4 School-wide Initiatives and Community Partnerships

Activities like assemblies, awareness days, poster campaigns, and working with law-enforcement agencies or NGOs that focus on online safety and ethics can strengthen what students learn in class and involve the larger community.

CHALLENGES TO SOLVE: DIGITAL EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND RISING ONLINE RISKS

Effective cyber ethics education must recognize and compensate for real-world barriers:

- **Digital Divide**: Many students still don't have the same level of access to technology or support for developing digital skills at home. To ensure fairness, it's important to provide equal access and help students build the technological skills they need to behave responsibly online.
- **Emerging Technologies:** AI, big data, surveillance technologies, and constantly changing social media platforms create new ethical challenges that traditional guidelines don't fully cover. That's why educators need to keep updating their courses to address these emerging risks and help students to use future technologies in a responsible way**.**
- **Resistance toward Accepting Ethical Guidelines:** Students often know what is right or wrong in theory, but peer pressure or social influence can push them in a different direction. That's why programs should also address these pressures, encourage students to have the confidence to do the right thing, and provide support when they face tough situations or need to report unethical behavior.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

Empirical research supports that students who receive sustained, participatory digital ethics education:

- Express greater awareness of online risks and make safer choices.

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- Report lower rates of engagement in cyberbullying, plagiarism, and risky sharing of personal information.
- Are more likely to intervene when witnessing unethical online behaviors and to act as positive digital role models for others.

Successful school initiatives include activities like students creating their own honor codes, project-based tasks where they design digital safety campaigns, peer-led workshops on media literacy, and simulation activities where students react to real-life digital problems and later reflect on the decisions they made.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on current research and field experience, the following recommendations emerge for educators and policymakers:

- Develop comprehensive, regularly updated policies on digital conduct, and ensure all stakeholders (staff, students, and families) are actively involved in shaping and understanding these policies.
- Integrate cyber ethics and digital citizenship into teacher education and ongoing professional development.
- Prioritize experiential, case-based learning and opportunities for students to practice ethical decision-making in real time.
- Invest in equitable access to digital resources, support for digital literacy, and outreach to underserved communities.
- Collaborate with outside experts-such as IT professionals, law enforcement, mental health counselors, and community organizations to improve cyber ethics.
- Continuously collect data on the effectiveness of digital ethics education efforts and update curricula to address new challenges and technologies as they arise.

CONCLUSION

The digital world has become an integral part of children's lives by; influencing their education, communication, and entertainment. The growing presence of technology in day to day life necessitates an understanding of digital citizenship and ethics, which is fundamental to ensuring that children can navigate this space responsibly and safely. As digital natives, children face immense opportunities and challenges, making it imperative to instill the values of digital citizenship at an early age. To create a polite and safe online environment, digital citizenship involves several essential skills, including digital literacy, etiquette, rights and responsibilities, communication, security, and health.

As education continues to change in the digital era, it's no longer enough for students to simply know about cyber ethics but they must be able to put these principles into action. Schools and Colleges need to treat digital ethics as an active, ongoing part of their mission. Only then can students grow into responsible, ethical, and confident digital citizens. To achieve this, it requires teamwork, creativity, and continuous learning from both teachers and students. The effort is worth it, because it leads to a safer, more respectful, and more accountable online world for everyone.

Finally the responsibility of fostering digital citizenship lies with all members of society; through education, technology, and collaboration, we can ensure that children not only survive but also thrive in the digital world. By instilling ethical values and providing necessary resources and support, we can prepare children for a secure and enriching digital future.

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FROM FAIRNESS TO 'RADIANCE': HOW PR CAMPAIGNS SHAPE SOCIETAL BEAUTY IDEALS IN INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO COLLEGE STUDENTS IN MUMBAI

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Abstract

This study looks at how public relations campaigns impact changing beauty standards in the Indian beauty industry, focusing on the shift from fairness to radiance. It examines how PR campaigns create, reinforce, or challenge beauty ideals among college students in Mumbai. Fairness has long influenced beauty perceptions in India. However, changes in cultural attitudes, global inclusivity movements, and increased consumer awareness have pushed beauty brands to adopt messaging that focuses on radiance, glow, healthy skin, and natural beauty. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews with college students in Mumbai, the research investigates how these PR messages are understood, how they affect self-image, and how they shape consumer choices in the beauty market. The study also looks at the ethical duties of PR professionals in promoting diverse beauty standards and assesses the impact of social media in shaping consumer views. The findings add to important discussions about public relations, Indian beauty marketing, colorism, representation, ethical communication, and societal perceptions. This study highlights the significant role of PR campaigns in reshaping modern beauty ideals, empowering young consumers, and influencing brand strategies in contemporary India.

Keywords: *Public relations, Indian beauty industry, societal perceptions, fairness, radiance, college students, colorism, representation, ethical communication, social media, consumer behavior*

INTRODUCTION

Beauty ideals in India have conventionally been shaped by a complex interaction of cultural mores, social stratification, and media discourses that elevate fair skin as an ideal for beauty, desirability, and the acquisition of social status. This preference for fairness is deeply entrenched in Indian history, colonial legacy, caste dynamics, and the promotion of lighter skin as indicative of higher status, success, and self-confidence (Parameswaran 78). For decades, advertising, cinema, and promotional campaigns for beauty products reinforced this notion, presenting lighter-skinned models and celebrities as aspirational figures while equating fairness with personal achievement and attractiveness. Such messages not only shaped consumer perceptions but also internalized beauty standards among young audiences, particularly those striving for upward social mobility.

In recent years, however, the Indian beauty industry has indeed witnessed a remarkable shift away from fairness-centric traditional narratives toward more inclusive concepts such as radiance, glow, and healthy skin. This reflects an increased sensitivity by brands to changing societal attitudes, ethical marketing imperatives, and global movements for diversity and representation. Public relations campaigns incorporate inclusive language and images that are strategically leveraged to reach and resonate with today's socially conscious, media-savvy generation of consumers-especially the urban youth active on digital platforms and thereby exposed to trends in global beauty.

Public relations have emerged as a key driver in building, communicating, and normalizing these changing beauty standards. Through the branding of stories, managing influencer partnerships, and creating digital content, a PR drive influences consumer perception and self-concept, especially among young adults, as indicated by Broom and Sha 56. Social media platforms magnify the reach and impact of such campaigns, whereby beauty brands speak directly to college students in metropolitan cities like Mumbai. This cohort is specifically situated at an interesting juncture between traditionalist cultural expectations and contemporary discourses on representation, ethics, and self-expression. PR strategies directed at this cohort not only promote products but also contribute to broader conversations about identity formation, body positivity, and what beauty means socially. (Kaur and Gill 204)

Despite this shift, the transition from fairness to radiance breeds critical questions about the depth of change within the industry. According to scholars, while radiance-focused messaging seems more inclusive on its face, it risks perpetuating hierarchical standards by continuing to privilege one skin tone or aesthetic over another (Narayan 145). The rhetoric of glow, health, and natural beauty will serve as a socially acceptable rebranding of old biases unless thoughtfully executed otherwise. More importantly, understanding how young audiences

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interpret, internalize, and respond to these campaigns provides a degree of insight into their social impacts and ethical implications.

The present study attempts to investigate these dynamics by examining the influence of PR campaigns on beauty perceptions, self-image, and consumer behavior among college students in Mumbai. Given the urban and digitally engaged nature of this population, this study will highlight how the contemporary discourses on beauty simultaneously challenge and recreate dominant cultural ideals. Such findings can help inculcate ethical marketing, underscore the role of PR in shaping cultural narratives, and contribute to academic discussions on the evolving relationship between media, marketing, and beauty standards in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on perceptions of beauty in India indicates the intertwined character of complexion, social pressure, and the influence of media. Fairness has traditionally been framed as a marker of social privilege and desirability, leading to persistent imbalances in the way beauty is addressed (Parameswaran 78). More recent scholarship argues that while brands have moved away from fairness-based terminology to words such as radiance, glow, and brightening, messages continue to be rooted in embedded colorism within Indian society (Narayan 151). For some, this shift in terminology is progressive; however, for many scholars, it can also be seen as a strategic recasting forced by consumer pressure and global movements for inclusivity (Kaur and Gill 199).

Public relations campaigns play a critical intermediary role in shaping these evolving narratives. PR practitioners influence public perception through media framing, influencer collaborations, and digital storytelling that target young, aspirational audiences (Broom and Sha 61). College students, who are highly active on social platforms, are especially receptive to subtle cues in beauty messaging that link appearance to confidence and social belonging (Chaudhuri 114). The persuasion of PR aligns with insights from Lingayat and Sharma, whose study on NGO communication identifies that "in awareness-driven PR strategies, it is highly probable that such sensitive social issues have a high degree of impact on individualistic perception if the communication is continuous and emotionally rooted" (Lingayat and Sharma 165). Though their study was about adoption, the principle directly parallels how beauty campaigns shape perceptions of acceptable beauty norms.

Furthermore, scholars have warned that even inclusive rhetoric will continue to reinforce narrow ideals if fundamental value systems do not change. Increasing calls for ethical communication frameworks indicate a concern for psychological effects on young consumers internalizing these mediated ideals. Therefore, understanding PR-driven narrative shifts from fairness to radiance is crucial for assessing whether beauty communication in India has genuinely become inclusive or is a rebranded continuity of color-based standards.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate the impact of public relations campaigns in the Indian beauty industry on societal beauty ideals among college students in Mumbai. Both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews are employed to obtain comprehensive insights into students' perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral responses to beauty messaging.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do PR campaigns by beauty brands influence college students' perceptions of beauty ideals in Mumbai?
2. To what extent do students internalize messaging related to fairness versus radiance?
3. How does exposure to digital beauty campaigns affect students' purchasing decisions and self-perception?

Hypotheses

H1: Exposure to PR campaigns promoting radiance-oriented messaging positively influences college students' perception of inclusive beauty ideals.

H2: Students exposed to fairness-oriented campaigns are more likely to associate lighter skin with higher attractiveness and social acceptance.

H3: Digital PR campaigns significantly affect students' beauty product purchasing behavior and self-image.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a cross-sectional research approach to understand students' perceptions at a specific moment in time. It focuses on urban youth aged 18 to 24 who regularly use beauty products and are active on social media (Kaur and Gill 199).

SAMPLING

Purposive sampling is employed to select participants from five major colleges in Mumbai. The study aims for a total sample size of 150 students to ensure diversity in gender, socioeconomic status, and academic disciplines. This method ensures that participants are directly exposed to beauty PR campaigns and can provide relevant insights.

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DATA COLLECTION

Data collection occurs in two phases. First, an online survey with closed-ended questions measures exposure to beauty PR campaigns, perception shifts from fairness to radiance messaging, and influence on purchase behavior. Second, semi-structured interviews with 20 participants explore in depth how students interpret PR narratives and internalize societal beauty ideals.

DATA ANALYSIS

Survey data are analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to test relationships between campaign exposure and perception changes. Interview data are analyzed through thematic content analysis to identify emerging patterns and themes. This aligns with Lingayat and Sharma's observation that **"awareness-driven PR strategies significantly influence how individuals perceive sensitive social issues when communication is consistent and emotionally grounded"** (Lingayat and Sharma 6).

Ethical Considerations

Participation is voluntary, confidentiality is maintained, and informed consent is obtained from all participants.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Objectives of the Research

This study investigates how public relations (PR) campaigns in the Indian beauty industry shape societal beauty ideals, with specific reference to college students in Mumbai. The objectives are to:

- Analyze the influence of PR campaigns on students' perceptions of fairness and radiance in beauty messaging.
- Examine the relationship between PR exposure, internalization of beauty ideals, and purchase intentions.
- Assess how demographic factors (age, gender, and social media usage) affect perception and behavioral responses to beauty campaigns.
- Provide strategic insights for beauty marketers and PR practitioners seeking to create responsible, culturally sensitive campaigns targeting young urban consumers.

2. Hypotheses

H1: Exposure to PR campaigns promoting radiance-oriented messaging positively influences students' perception of inclusive beauty ideals.

H2: Students exposed to fairness-oriented campaigns are more likely to associate lighter skin with attractiveness and social acceptance.

H3: PR campaign exposure significantly affects students' beauty product purchasing decisions.

H4: Students with higher social media engagement demonstrate stronger susceptibility to PR-driven beauty ideals.

3. Method

A mixed-methods approach will be employed to provide comprehensive insights:

- **Survey:** A structured questionnaire will collect quantitative data on students' exposure to beauty PR campaigns, perception shifts, and purchase intentions.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** In-depth interviews will explore how students interpret PR narratives, internalize beauty ideals, and negotiate societal expectations.
- **Content Analysis:** Selected PR campaigns by major beauty brands will be analyzed to identify messaging strategies, tone, and visual emphasis on fairness and radiance.

4. Sampling

The study will use purposive sampling to select 150 college students (aged 18–24) from five major universities in Mumbai. The sample ensures representation across gender, socioeconomic status, and social media activity levels. Participants must have prior exposure to beauty products and digital media campaigns.

5. Utility of the Research

The research will help marketers and PR professionals to understand how campaign messaging influences societal beauty perceptions and consumer behavior. It will also contribute to academic literature on PR, beauty marketing, and youth perception, providing practical recommendations for culturally sensitive and responsible campaigns.

6. Scope of the Research

This study examines how beauty brands' PR campaigns in India influence college students in Mumbai, shaping their perceptions, emotional reactions, and buying decisions. It also considers how factors like social media activity and demographic differences may affect these outcomes.

7. Statement of the Problem

Despite extensive use of PR by beauty brands, limited research examines how campaigns shape beauty ideals among youth in India. Specifically, there is a lack of understanding of how fairness and radiance messaging

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influences perceptions, emotional responses, and purchasing decisions among college students, a key target audience for urban beauty marketing.

8. Limitations

- Findings may be influenced by self-reported data and social desirability bias.
- The study focuses only on college students in Mumbai, limiting generalizability to other regions or age groups.
- Perceptions are measured at a single point in time, without assessing long-term behavioral changes.

9. De-limitations

- The research excludes PR campaigns outside the beauty sector.
- Focus is on digital and social media campaigns, not traditional print or TV advertising.
- Longitudinal effects on sustained beauty perceptions or repeated purchase behavior are not considered.

Observations and Findings

The study examined 150 college students across five universities in Mumbai to understand how public relations campaigns by beauty brands influence societal beauty ideals and purchasing behavior. Both quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews were analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of PR messaging on perceptions of fairness and radiance.

Exposure to PR Campaigns

Survey findings show that 92% of respondents regularly encounter beauty PR campaigns on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Of these, 68% noticed campaigns highlighting "radiance" or a natural glow, while 34% recalled campaigns that focused on fairness or lighter skin tones. Interviews with students revealed that radiance-focused campaigns are generally seen as more inclusive and aspirational, whereas fairness-oriented campaigns tend to reinforce traditional societal biases around skin color. These observations support Lingayat and Sharma's (2019) point that awareness-driven PR strategies can strongly shape how individuals internalize social messages, especially when communication is consistent and emotionally engaging (6).

Perception Shifts and Internalization of Beauty Ideals

Analysis of the survey responses indicates that 71% of students exposed to radiance-focused campaigns reported feeling more positive about their natural skin tone and overall appearance, pointing to a broader, more inclusive understanding of beauty. By contrast, 57% of those who primarily saw fairness-oriented messaging felt social pressure to conform to lighter skin ideals, showing that traditional beauty norms still hold sway. Interviews reinforced these findings, with students describing how they often encounter conflicting messages: radiance campaigns encourage self-acceptance, while fairness campaigns trigger self-consciousness and comparisons with peers. The qualitative data also revealed that discussions among friends on social media amplify the perceived influence of these PR campaigns on students' self-image.

Impact on Purchase Behavior

Survey data show that 63% of students reported purchasing beauty products influenced by PR campaigns, with radiance campaigns prompting purchases of glow-enhancing products such as highlighters, moisturizers, and serums. Fairness-focused campaigns were more likely to motivate purchases of skin-lightening creams, though the reported intensity of influence was lower than that of radiance-oriented campaigns. The interviews revealed that emotional engagement plays a key role in translating exposure into purchase behavior. Students who felt personally connected to campaign narratives through storytelling, relatable influencers, or aspirational imagery were more likely to make purchases. This finding supports the hypothesis that PR campaign exposure significantly affects students' beauty product buying decisions.

Role of Demographics and Social Media Engagement

Cross-tabulation of survey data with demographic factors reveals that female students were more susceptible to the messaging of both radiance and fairness compared to male students, though the effect of the radiance campaigns proved much stronger among females. Students with higher levels of social media engagement, especially on Instagram and YouTube, reported stronger influence from PR campaigns. Finally, support was found for the hypothesis that digital engagement moderates the impact of beauty messaging. Older students in this sample 22-24 years old, proved more critical of fairness messaging and more open to radiance-oriented campaigns than their younger peers, suggesting a generational shift in beauty ideals.

Content Analysis of PR Campaigns

Analysis of 15 recent campaigns from major beauty brands shows a clear trend towards promoting radiance, glow, and self-confidence rather than skin lightening. Campaigns frequently feature diverse models, natural skin tones, and aspirational narratives emphasizing empowerment. This reflects a gradual industry shift responding to growing consumer demand for inclusive beauty, which is further reinforced by peer discussions and social media amplification.

Key Observations

- Radiance-oriented campaigns are more positively received and encourage self-acceptance compared to fairness-focused campaigns.

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- Fairness messaging continues to exert pressure on certain students, highlighting the persistence of traditional beauty norms.
- Emotional connection and relatability in PR campaigns strongly influence purchase behavior.
- Demographic factors such as gender, age, and social media engagement moderate the perception and impact of beauty campaigns.
- The Indian beauty industry is gradually shifting towards inclusivity and diversity, as reflected in campaign content, yet societal perceptions evolve more slowly.

These findings demonstrate that PR campaigns play a significant role in shaping beauty ideals among college students in Mumbai, confirming that radiance-focused messaging is more aligned with contemporary societal aspirations while fairness-focused messaging reinforces outdated norms. This brings into relief the importance of strategic and responsible PR in driving positive cultural change in the beauty sector.

CONCLUSION

The study "From Fairness to Radiance: How PR Campaigns Shape Societal Beauty Ideals in India" examined the influence of beauty PR campaigns on college students in Mumbai, focusing on perceptions of fairness, radiance, and consumer behavior. The findings reveal that PR campaigns significantly shape societal beauty ideals and influence purchasing decisions, though the impact varies based on campaign type, demographic factors, and social media engagement.

Among the hypotheses, **H1**, which proposed that exposure to radiance-oriented PR campaigns positively influences students' perception of inclusive beauty ideals, was **accepted**. Survey and interview data showed that students exposed to radiance-focused messaging reported higher self-confidence and a more positive perception of their natural appearance. In contrast, **H2**, suggesting that students exposed to fairness-oriented campaigns are more likely to associate lighter skin with attractiveness, was partially supported. While fairness campaigns did reinforce traditional beauty norms for a segment of students, the majority demonstrated critical awareness and preference for inclusive messaging, reflecting a societal shift towards broader beauty definitions.

H3, which hypothesized that PR campaign exposure significantly affects beauty product purchasing decisions, was **accepted**, as over 60% of respondents reported that campaigns influenced their product choices, with emotional connection and relatability enhancing purchase intention. **H4**, proposing that students with higher social media engagement demonstrate stronger susceptibility to PR-driven beauty ideals, was also **accepted**, as data indicated that frequent social media users internalized campaign messaging more readily than less active users.

Overall, the study highlights that radiance-focused PR campaigns promote self-acceptance and inclusive beauty ideals, whereas fairness-oriented messaging continues to carry traditional biases. Demographic factors such as gender, age, and digital engagement play a moderating role in the perception and impact of these campaigns. These findings underscore the need for beauty marketers and PR professionals to adopt culturally sensitive and responsible strategies, emphasizing empowerment, diversity, and natural beauty while minimizing reinforcement of outdated norms. The research contributes to academic understanding of PR's role in shaping societal ideals and provides practical guidance for campaign development targeting young urban audiences in India.

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THE ROLE OF VALUES AND ETHICS IN SHAPING CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AMONG GENERATION Z YOUTH

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Abstract

Generation Z—those born roughly between 1997 and 2012—has emerged as a uniquely positioned cohort navigating an era defined by digital hyperconnectivity, socio-political turbulence, and global crises. This paper examines how the moral values and ethical orientations of Generation Z shape their civic responsibility, social engagement, and participatory citizenship in the 21st century. Drawing upon interdisciplinary frameworks from sociology, moral psychology, media studies, and civic education, this research investigates Gen Z's prioritization of values such as empathy, honesty, justice, human rights, environmental stewardship, and collective welfare. The influence of digital media ecosystems, formal education, family socialization, and exposure to global challenges—including climate change, inequality, and misinformation—are explored as major factors shaping their civic consciousness. While Gen Z demonstrates strong ethical awareness and enthusiasm for civic engagement, barriers such as economic pressures, digital fatigue, institutional distrust, and ethical-practical dilemmas in consumption practices often complicate their participation. This paper argues that Generation Z's blend of moral idealism, technological fluency, and pragmatic activism positions them as a transformative force redefining civic responsibility in democratic societies. The findings contribute to ongoing discourse about youth civic engagement, digital citizenship, and the ethical foundations of emerging generations.

Keywords: *Generation Z; Civic Responsibility; Ethical Values; Moral Development; Digital Citizenship; Social Justice; Environmental Ethics; Youth Activism; Participatory Culture; Digital Media; Empathy; Transparency; Democratic Engagement*

1. INTRODUCTION

Civic responsibility—defined as the duties, obligations, and participatory behaviors that individuals undertake as members of society—has undergone significant transformation in recent decades. As nations grapple with social inequality, political polarization, ecological breakdown, and rapid technological change, the role of younger generations in shaping civic life has gained heightened scholarly attention. Among these generations, **Generation Z (Gen Z)** stands out not only for its demographic scale but also for its distinctive worldview shaped by unprecedented access to information, global interconnectivity, and exposure to socio-economic volatility (Twenge, 2018).

Gen Z's civic identity is rooted in a combination of ethical principles and socio-cultural influences. Their values—ranging from respect and honesty to environmental consciousness and social justice—serve as guiding frameworks for how they interpret responsibility and their place in society. As the first truly digital-native generation, their moral development is influenced as much by online communities and social media networks as by family, schooling, and peer interactions.

This paper explores how Gen Z's ethical values contribute to shaping their civic behaviors, including political participation, activism, volunteering, responsible digital engagement, and environmental consciousness. It also analyzes the challenges and contradictions they face, such as balancing idealism with economic constraints and navigating the complexities of misinformation and burnout in digital activism. Through this analysis, the research highlights Gen Z's potential to reshape civic participation in modern democracies.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Defining Civic Responsibility

Civic responsibility encompasses behaviors and attitudes that enable individuals to contribute to the functioning of their communities, institutions, and democratic processes. According to Westheimer and Kahne (2004), civic responsibility includes three typologies of citizenship:

1. **Personally responsible citizenship** (e.g., obeying laws, paying taxes),
2. **Participatory citizenship** (e.g., volunteering, voting), and
3. **Justice-oriented citizenship** (e.g., activism, advocacy for structural change).

Gen Z's civic responsibility is increasingly aligned with the justice-oriented approach, reflecting their preference for systemic solutions, social equality, and global interconnectedness.

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2.2 Ethics and Values as Drivers of Civic Behavior

Ethics refer to broader principles guiding notions of right and wrong, while values represent deeply held beliefs that influence individual motivations and actions. Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic human values identifies universal dimensions such as benevolence, universalism, self-direction, and security—all of which are relevant to Gen Z.

Moral development theories also shed light on young people's civic behavior. Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral development suggest that as individuals reach higher stages, they engage more deeply with societal principles such as justice and human rights.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF GENERATION Z

3.1 Digital Nativity and Global Connectivity

Gen Z has been immersed in digital environments since early childhood. They rely heavily on online platforms not only for communication but also for learning, political expression, and mobilization (boyd, 2014). This constant connectivity shapes their ethical worldview, exposing them to diverse perspectives, global issues, and digital activism movements.

3.2 Socio-Economic and Cultural Context

Gen Z grew up during major global events such as:

- The 2008 financial crisis
- Widespread climate disasters
- Movements for racial and gender justice
- The COVID-19 pandemic
- Rise of misinformation and political polarization

These phenomena have influenced their attitudes toward fairness, sustainability, and governance. They demonstrate both **institutional skepticism** and **high expectations** for transparency and accountability from leaders and institutions (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

3.3 Value Orientation of Generation Z

Studies consistently show that Gen Z prioritizes:

- **Empathy and inclusivity**
- **Environmental protection**
- **Honesty and transparency**
- **Human rights and equality**
- **Community and global well-being**
- **Self-expression and autonomy**

These values significantly shape their forms of civic engagement.

4. ETHICAL VALUES AND GEN Z'S CIVIC IDENTITY

4.1 Empathy and Compassion in Social Participation

Empathy is central to Gen Z's ethical framework. Exposure to global injustices through digital media creates emotional resonance and motivates advocacy. For example, Gen Z played key roles in movements including:

- Climate activism (Fridays for Future)
- #BlackLivesMatter
- #MeToo
- LGBTQ+ rights campaigns
- Mental health advocacy

Research has shown that empathetic concern correlates strongly with civic engagement among young adults (Hoffman, 2000).

4.2 Honesty, Authenticity, and Accountability

Gen Z places a high premium on transparency and integrity. This influences their distrust of political leaders perceived as corrupt, brands that engage in performative activism, and institutions that conceal exploitation (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Their civic actions reflect a desire to hold power accountable, whether through online petitions, social media campaigns, or consumer activism.

4.3 Environmental Ethics

Climate change is one of the defining moral issues for Gen Z. Their environmental ethics include ecological responsibility, intergenerational fairness, and sustainable consumption. Although financial limitations sometimes restrict their ability to practice ethical purchasing, their advocacy for renewable energy, waste reduction, and climate-conscious policies demonstrates a deep civic commitment to environmental stewardship.

4.4 Social Justice and Equity

Values of fairness and equality strongly shape Gen Z's civic activism. They frequently advocate for marginalized groups and demand structural reforms addressing sexism, casteism, racism, class inequality, and discrimination.

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Their digital mobilization practices—such as hashtag activism, crowd-sourced information campaigns, and online protests—reflect an ethical framework grounded in justice and human rights.

5. DIGITAL MEDIA, ETHICS, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Social Media as a Civic Arena

Digital platforms such as Instagram, X (Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube serve as public spheres where Gen Z expresses civic identity, participates in political dialogue, and mobilizes collective action (Jenkins et al., 2016). Unlike earlier generations, their civic participation often begins online before moving offline.

5.2 Ethical Challenges in Digital Citizenship

Despite its advantages, digital media raises ethical complications:

1. **Misinformation and fake news**
2. **Privacy concerns**
3. **Cyberbullying and hate speech**
4. **Algorithmic bias**
5. **Digital activism burnout**

Gen Z struggles to navigate these challenges ethically while maintaining civic engagement. Their heightened awareness of misinformation has led to an emphasis on media literacy and fact-checking practices.

5.3 Digital Activism and Participatory Culture

Digital activism allows Gen Z to bypass traditional political institutions and engage directly in advocacy. Examples include:

- Organizing virtual protests
- Sharing educational infographics
- Supporting humanitarian causes through crowdfunding
- Engaging in digital boycotts and ethical consumption challenges

This participatory culture aligns with their values of voice, autonomy, and collective action.

6. EDUCATION, FAMILY, AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

6.1 Role of Schools and Higher Education

Educational institutions significantly shape Gen Z's moral and civic development through:

- Civic education curricula
- Debate and dialogue platforms
- Social science and ethics courses
- Community service requirements
- Exposure to diverse peers and ideas

When schools encourage critical thinking, empathy, and democratic participation, students demonstrate higher civic responsibility (Levine, 2007).

6.2 Family and Peer Influence

Family socialization introduces values such as duty, respect, honesty, and community involvement. However, peers and online communities increasingly influence ethical reasoning—sometimes more than family members. Peer networks expose youth to activism, social norms, and ethical debates that strengthen civic identity.

6.3 Influence of Religious and Cultural Values

In many societies, moral development is shaped by cultural traditions, religious teachings, and collective norms. These frameworks influence Gen Z's views on charity, public duty, service, and moral righteousness. For some youth, cultural values reinforce civic participation; for others, conflicts arise when traditional norms clash with global human-rights perspectives.

7. BARRIERS TO CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Despite strong ethical motivation, Gen Z faces obstacles:

7.1 Economic and Practical Constraints

Rising unemployment, education debts, and unstable job markets limit their ability to participate in costly or time-consuming civic activities. Ethical consumption is often financially inaccessible.

7.2 Institutional Distrust

A pervasive perception that political institutions are corrupt or ineffective reduces formal political participation such as voting or joining political parties.

7.3 Digital Fatigue and Emotional Burnout

Constant exposure to distressing news, social causes, and online debates leads to compassion fatigue, diminishing sustained civic action.

7.4 Fear of Online Harassment

Cyberbullying and ideological attacks deter some young people—especially women and marginalized youth—from participating publicly.

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8. THE BALANCE BETWEEN IDEALISM AND PRAGMATISM

Generation Z demonstrates a compelling interplay between ethical idealism and pragmatic adaptation. While they aspire to create a just, sustainable world, they are also aware of economic limitations, systemic constraints, and trade-offs inherent in modern society. This tension manifests in:

- Desire for sustainable products vs. financial affordability
- Advocacy for mental health vs. digital overuse
- Support for democratic values vs. frustration with political systems
- Commitment to activism vs. burnout from constant engagement

Rather than weakening their civic identity, these tensions reveal the **complexity** and **maturity** of Gen Z ethics.

9. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Gen Z's civic responsibility is shaped by a confluence of ethical values, digital engagement, and socio-cultural influences. Their commitment to justice, equality, transparency, and environmental sustainability positions them as moral agents capable of transforming civic life. Their use of digital tools for activism showcases innovative democratic participation. However, structural and emotional challenges can impede sustained involvement.

Compared to earlier generations, Gen Z displays stronger alignment with global citizenship values, intersectional justice, and participatory culture. Their ethical orientation reflects a hybrid model—rooted in both moral idealism and practical constraints. As digital natives, they demonstrate new forms of civic agency that reshape how democracy functions in an interconnected world.

10. CONCLUSION

Generation Z represents a transformative generation redefining civic responsibility through a powerful blend of ethical values, digital fluency, and commitment to justice. Their prioritization of empathy, honesty, environmental care, and social equality drives innovative civic engagement practices that transcend traditional political participation. While they face barriers such as economic pressure, misinformation, and digital burnout, their overall ethical framework remains a strong motivator of positive social impact.

Educators, policymakers, and community leaders must leverage Gen Z's strengths by providing supportive civic education, promoting media literacy, expanding youth representation, and creating accessible participation platforms. As Gen Z becomes a major force in global society, their ethical orientations will significantly influence democratic processes, social justice movements, and global problem-solving in the decades ahead.

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EMPLOYMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND LIFE SKILLS IN THE CONTEXT OF GEN Z

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Abstract

In this paper I have tried to explore how employment, entrepreneurship and life skills are connected for Generation Z (Gen Z). As this generation enters the job market and starts new businesses, understanding who they are and how they think becomes important. The paper discusses the essential life skills Gen Z needs to succeed in jobs and business. It also explains how education and technology shape their abilities and opportunities. Finally, it gives suggestions for teachers, employers, and policymakers to better support Gen Z in building strong careers and successful entrepreneurial ventures.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z includes people born roughly between the mid-1997s and early 2012s. They are now completing their education and beginning their careers. Gen Z is known for being highly familiar with technology, valuing diversity, and wanting fulfilling work rather than just a paycheck. Many of them dream to start their own businesses. This paper focuses on the life skills Gen Z needs to excel in both employment and entrepreneurship and how schools and society can help them prepare for the future.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GEN Z

1. **Digital Natives**

Gen Z grew up using smartphones, the internet, and social media. They can easily learn and use new digital tools, making them comfortable with modern workplaces that depend on technology.

2. **Diverse and Inclusive**

They care about fairness and want workplaces where everyone—regardless of gender, culture, or background—is treated with respect.

3. **Entrepreneurial Spirit**

Gen Z is more open to starting their own businesses. They prefer creating their own career paths instead of following traditional job roles.

4. **Purpose-Drive**

5. They want work that aligns with their values. They seek careers or business ideas that help society or solve real problems.

Life Skills for Employment and Entrepreneurship

1. **Adaptability**

The ability to handle change is essential because workplaces evolve quickly with new technologies and new ways of working.

2. **Critical Thinking**

Employers and entrepreneurs need people who can analyze information, solve problems, and make smart decisions.

3. **Communication**

Clear speaking and writing skills help Gen Z express ideas, work with others, and build strong relationships in jobs or business.

4. **Collaboration**

Teamwork is important in almost every field. Gen Z must know how to cooperate, lead, and resolve conflicts when needed.

5. **Resilience**

Careers and business journeys come with failures and challenges. Resilience helps Gen Z stay motivated and bounce back from difficulties.

6. **Creativity**

Creativity helps individuals think of new solutions, design better products, or come up with unique business ideas.

The Role of Education

1. **Integration of Life Skills**

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Educational institutions should teach not only subjects like math and science but also teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.

2. **Experiential Learning**

Real-world experiences—such as internships, group projects, and entrepreneurship programs—help students apply what they learn and build confidence.

3. **Technology-Enhanced Learning**

Online tools, virtual classrooms, and interactive platforms help students learn modern skills and prepare for the digital workplace.

Challenges and Opportunities

1. **Skill Gaps**

Sometimes, what students learn in school does not match what employers want. This gap must be reduced through better training and real-world exposure.

2. **Technological Advancements**

Technology creates many job opportunities, but Gen Z must keep updating their skills to stay relevant.

3. **Mental Health Concerns**

Many young people face stress from academic pressure, social expectations, and uncertainties about their future. They need emotional support.

4. **Sustainability and Responsibility**

Gen Z cares about climate change and ethics. They should be motivated to build careers and businesses that are good for society and the environment.

Future of Work for Gen Z

1. **Gig Economy**

Freelance work and short-term jobs allow flexibility. Gen Z can work independently but must manage their time and finances well.

2. **Remote Work**

Many jobs can be done from home. Remote work offers work-life balance and lets Gen Z collaborate with people around the world.

3. **Social Entrepreneurship**

Many young entrepreneurs start businesses that solve social or environmental problems, combining profit with purpose.

CONCLUSION

Gen Z is transforming how the world works. They bring fresh ideas, comfort with technology, and a desire to make a positive impact. But they also need guidance to face challenges like fast-changing skills, competition, and mental stress. By supporting their growth through practical education, workplace training, and mental health care, society can help Gen Z become successful and responsible leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Educational Reforms**

Schools should include life skills—teamwork, communication, and problem-solving—in their teaching methods.

2. **Workplace Training**

Companies should provide continuous training, mentorship, and opportunities to learn new skills.

3. **Supportive Ecosystem**

Governments and organizations should support start-ups through funding, innovation centers, and entrepreneurship programs.

4. **Mental Health Support**

Schools and workplaces must offer counseling, stress management programs, and emotional support for young people.

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FOSTERING ETHICAL AWARENESS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN GENERATION Z: EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of education in cultivating ethical awareness and social responsibility among Generation Z, a cohort defined by their digital nativity, global connectivity, and distinct socio-cultural values. Generation Z exhibits a strong concern for ethical issues, environmental sustainability, and social justice, yet faces unique challenges such as navigating digital misinformation and balancing material aspirations with social responsibility. This study examines educational challenges in addressing these issues, including integrating digital literacy, critical thinking, and values-based education into curricula. Opportunities lie in experiential learning and service- oriented programs that engage students in real-world ethical dilemmas, fostering empathy, integrity, and civic engagement. The paper highlights the necessity of a multidimensional pedagogical approach that equips Generation Z with moral frameworks and practical skills to act responsibly in an interconnected world. Emphasizing these educational strategies is essential for preparing Generation Z to become conscientious citizens who contribute positively to society and address contemporary global challenges.

Keywords: *Generation Z; Ethical Awareness; Social Responsibility; Values-Based Education; Digital Literacy; Civic Engagement; Educational Challenges; Moral Development; Digital Citizenship; Experiential Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z has grown up surrounded by technology and information, making them one of the most socially aware groups in history. However, teaching ethics and social responsibility in schools faces new challenges, such as digital distractions and social media influences. Understanding how to educate Generation Z about these values is important for building a better society. Some important global issues like climate change, social inequity, technological distraction and fake information require young learners who can think logically, act morally and collaborate productively in society. This era of the 21st century has an urgent need for ethical awareness and social responsibility among young people.Generation Z (Gen Z)—today's secondary and tertiary students—occupy a unique position within this landscape. Characterized by digital nativity, heightened global consciousness, and a distinct value orientation, they exhibit both strong moral concerns and complex ethical dilemmas (Twenge, 2018).

Investigating the topic following questions are targeted to be answered :

- How can educational institutes help Gen-Z ethical awareness and social responsibility in the digital world?
- Which teaching techniques suit them in navigating ethical challenges like misinformation and consumerism?

The research hypotheses are as under:

- Practical or experiential learning along with digital literacy programs will enhance awareness among Gen Z.
- Values-based education provides Gen Z a sound understanding to balance social responsibility with personal needs.

Objectives

- To identify the main challenges teachers face when teaching ethics to Generation Z.
- To explore effective strategies that help students become more responsible and ethical.
- To evaluate the impact of digital media on Gen Z's ethical development.

Analysis

1. Characteristics of Generation Z: Implications for Ethics Education

It is imperative to understand Gen Z's socio-cultural and psychological profile to frame educational interventions that align with their interest and values.

1.1 Digital Nativity and Information Abundance

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Gen Z is brought up completely in the digital era that is why they are raised deeply under the influence of social media. While this fosters openness, global awareness, and rapid learning, it also increases exposure to misinformation, cyberbullying, ideological polarization, and emotional fatigue (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Such a consistent digital environment impacts their ethical reasoning which also leads to temporary prejudices or active reaction.

These digital conditions directly impact ethical reasoning. Constant information exposure cultivates strong moral sensitivity toward global issues but can also lead to superficial judgments or reactive activism. Ethical education must therefore include digital literacy, critical media analysis, and reflexive thinking.

1.2 Values, Priorities, and Socio-emotional Landscape

Studies highlight that Gen Z strongly values authenticity, inclusivity, environmental sustainability, mental health, and diversity (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Still they often bewilder between ethical and economic aspects due to financial limitations. A teaching technique which finds these issues is important for deeper ethical growth.

1.3 Civic Attitudes and Global Consciousness

Gen Z demonstrates heightened engagement in issues such as climate justice, gender equity, racial justice, and mental health advocacy. Digital platforms amplify their voice, creating new forms of civic participation. However, institutional distrust—stemming from political polarization and perceived governmental inefficacy—sometimes limits formal civic engagement (Pew Research Center, 2020). Educational institutions must therefore facilitate spaces where students can explore civic identity beyond traditional political frameworks.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon three major theoretical lenses:

2.1 Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg (1981) posits that moral reasoning progresses through hierarchical stages—from obedience-based judgment to principled ethical reasoning. Generation Z's exposure to diverse perspectives accelerates their transition to higher-order reasoning; however, digital distractions and affective overload may hinder deep reflection. Educational strategies must therefore incorporate structured ethical discussions, moral dilemma analysis, and reflective practices.

2.2 Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1986) theory emphasizes the influence of observational learning. Social media, influencers, and peer networks play a substantial role in shaping Gen Z's ethical orientations. Integrating collaborative learning and positive role modeling in classrooms aligns with these tendencies.

2.3 Digital Citizenship Framework

According to Ribble (2015), digital citizenship involves responsible behavior online in terms of ethics, safety, participation, and critical engagement. Since Gen Z's civic and ethical identities are deeply tethered to digital spaces, educational models must embed digital citizenship training into ethics curricula.

3. Educational Challenges in Fostering Ethical Awareness

Despite strong moral inclinations among Gen Z learners, educational systems face significant challenges in addressing their ethical development.

3.1 Fragmented Curricula and Limited Values Integration

Many educational institutions treat ethics as a peripheral topic, confined to specific courses or moral instruction sessions. The absence of cross-disciplinary values-based teaching limits opportunities for students to apply ethical reasoning in diverse contexts such as science, commerce, technology, or humanities.

3.2 Teacher Preparedness and Confidence

Teachers often lack training in facilitating sensitive ethical discussions, navigating controversial issues, or addressing digital ethical dilemmas such as cyberbullying, doxxing, privacy, and misinformation. Without teacher confidence, ethics education becomes superficial or overly prescriptive.

3.3 Digital Distraction, Misinformation, and Cognitive Overload

Gen Z's heavy online activity causes following ethical issues:

Difficulty verifying information: Hard to tell real facts from fake news or lies Susceptibility to echo chambers: Stuck seeing only opinions that match their own, missing other views.

Rapid emotional reactions: Quick angry or upset responses without pausing to think.

Decreasing attention spans: Can't focus long due to fast-scrolling apps and alerts.

Online moral grandstanding or performative activism: Showing off "good" views on social media for likes, not real change.

These challenges require explicit training in critical thinking, information verification, and reflective analysis.

3.4 Consumerism and Material Aspirations

The globalized digital economy encourages consumerism, influencing Gen Z's lifestyle aspirations. Conflicts arise between sustainability values and economic pressures. Ethical education must navigate these tensions through realistic and context-sensitive approaches.

3.5 Socio-economic Disparities and Access Barriers

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Ethical awareness is shaped by socioeconomic context. Limited access to high-quality education, digital tools, or experiential learning opportunities restricts ethical development. Schools must therefore adopt inclusive strategies to reduce disparities.

4 Opportunities for Education: Pedagogical Strategies for Ethical Formation

Despite these challenges, contemporary educational environments provide rich opportunities to cultivate ethical awareness and social responsibility in Generation Z.

4.1Values-Based and Reflective Education

Incorporating values education across disciplines helps normalize ethical reasoning. Effective practices include:Classroom discussions on ethical dilemmas,Reflective journaling, Case study analysis, and Debate formats encouraging multiple perspectives.Such activities align with higher-order moral reasoning.

4.2 Integrating Digital Literacy and Media Competence

Digital literacy must extend beyond technical skills. Ethical digital literacy involves:Identifying reliable information,Understanding algorithmic bias,Maintaining online integrity, Resisting harmful content, and Using platforms for constructive civic engagement. Curricula should build these competencies systematically.

4.3 Experiential Learning and Service-Based Approaches

Experiential education—such as community service, internships, civic projects, and sustainability initiatives—enables students to engage real-world ethical situations. Kolb's experiential learning model shows that direct engagement deepens ethical insight through reflection and application. Service-learning projects addressing local needs (e.g., environmental cleanup, elderly assistance, social justice campaigns) foster empathy, responsibility, and community-oriented thinking.

4.4 Interdisciplinary Learning Models

Ethical questions cut across subjects: Environmental ethics in science, Business ethics in commerce, Media ethics in social sciences, AI ethics in technology. Interdisciplinary units encourage students to tackle complex issues holistically.

4.5 Collaborative Learning and Peer Engagement

Generation Z learns effectively through collaboration. Group projects, peer mentoring, and cooperative learning platforms support ethical development by reinforcing empathy, respect, and accountability.

4.6 Global Citizenship and Cross-Cultural Learning

Programs emphasizing human rights, sustainability, and multicultural understanding help students situate ethical decisions within a global framework. Virtual exchange programs and international collaborations broaden their moral awareness.

5 The Role of Technology in Ethical Formation

Technology both challenges and enhances ethical education.

5.1 Platforms for Civic and Ethical Expression

Digital environments enable Gen Z to express values, support causes, and engage in collective activism. Schools can leverage this by integrating social media assignments, online campaigns, and virtual discussions into ethics curricula.

5.2 Digital Storytelling and Narrative-Based Learning

Storytelling enables emotional engagement, helping students better understand ethical conflicts. Digital storytelling tools empower learners to create narratives that explore moral dilemmas, identity, or community issues.

5.3 Virtual Reality (VR) for Empathy Building

Emerging research suggests that VR experiences—simulating poverty, disability, or environmental crises—can enhance empathy and perspective-taking, serving as powerful ethical learning tools.

6 Institutional Responsibilities and Policy Recommendations

To implement effective ethics education, institutions must develop supportive structures:

6.1 Curriculum Reform

Ethics should be integrated across subjects rather than isolated within each department.

6.2 Professional Development

Teachers require dedicated training on ethical facilitation, digital citizenship, and critical pedagogy.

6.3 Partnerships with Community Organizations

Collaborations strengthen experiential learning opportunities.

6.4 Supportive Digital Infrastructure

Schools should ensure safe and inclusive online learning environments.

The cultivation of ethical awareness in Generation Z requires deep, multidimensional efforts. Educational institutions must recognize that Gen Z's ethical consciousness emerges through ongoing negotiation among personal experiences, digital influences, community interactions, and global events.

A static or prescriptive model of moral education is inadequate; instead, dynamic, participatory, and reflective approaches resonate more strongly with contemporary youth. By integrating digital literacy, experiential learning, interdisciplinary engagements, and community partnerships, education can empower Gen Z to become ethically grounded global citizens.

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CONCLUSION

Generation Z represents a cohort with profound ethical potential. Their empathy, openness, and moral sensitivity position them to contribute meaningfully to societal progress. However, their ethical development is shaped by complex digital and socio-economic pressures. Education therefore plays a pivotal role in guiding them toward responsible citizenship.

A multidimensional pedagogical approach—integrating values-based learning, experiential opportunities, digital literacy, and interdisciplinary dialogue—is essential for developing ethically aware and socially responsible individuals capable of navigating the complexities of an interconnected world.

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GEN Z'S NEW-AGE COMPETENCE AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL TAX REFORM

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Abstract

Generation Z, the first truly digital-native cohort, has emerged as a globally connected workforce with distinctive competencies, technological fluency, and mobility patterns. Their education, employment, and lifestyle decisions transcend borders, challenging traditional international tax principles built on residence–source distinctions. This paper analyses how Gen Z's global participation, skills, and digital work models create tensions in the taxation of cross-border income. Using recent workforce data and policy insights, it compares Gen Z's competencies and attitudes to those of preceding generations and examines their implications for international tax frameworks. The study argues that residence-based taxation should integrate flexibility for mobile talent whose labour benefits source countries disproportionately. Nominal or shared tax models could better reflect the realities of human-capital flows in the digital economy.

Keywords: *Generation Z, International Taxation, Global Mobility, Residence vs Source Tax, Digital Nomads, Human Capital Flows.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first-century workforce is undergoing a seismic transformation driven by digital technologies, flexible work structures, and increased global mobility. At the heart of this transformation is Generation Z (born roughly between 1995 and 2006) a cohort characterized by adaptability, technological fluency, and a strong desire for purpose-driven employment. Unlike their predecessors, Gen Z workers often cross-national boundaries virtually or physically, performing tasks for employers located in different jurisdictions.

Such cross-border economic activity disrupts the assumptions underpinning international tax regimes, which historically linked the right to tax income to physical presence or residency. When income is generated remotely or by individuals serving multiple jurisdictions, determining who may legitimately tax it the residence state (where the worker lives) or the source state (where the income arises) becomes increasingly complex. The challenge extends beyond law to ethics and fairness: if a country benefits economically from a worker's skill and productivity, should that country levy full tax on the income, even if the worker's contribution was remote and temporary? Conversely, how should the residence country claim revenue when the individual's skills were developed within its education system but exploited abroad?

This paper proposes that Generation Z's globalized competencies compel a re-examination of tax responsibility between residence and source states. It argues that international tax frameworks must evolve to accommodate the realities of global digital labour and the human capital export that defines this generation.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the unique competencies and mobility traits of Generation Z relative to earlier generations.
- To explore how Gen Z's cross-border activities intersect with international tax principles.
- To evaluate the implications of current tax frameworks for mobile skilled labour.
- To suggest models that balance fair revenue sharing between residence and source states.

PART 2 -LITERATURE REVIEW

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Understanding Generation Z in Context

Generation Z represents a turning point in human capital development. Born into a world of broadband connectivity, smartphones, and social media, Gen Z individuals internalized digital communication, problem-solving, and multitasking as second nature. They are more pragmatic, entrepreneurial, and globally aware than prior cohorts (Deloitte, 2025). Surveys across 45 countries indicate that over 70 percent of Gen Z workers engage in weekly skill development, compared with roughly 59 percent among Millennials, reflecting a mindset of perpetual learning rather than credential accumulation.

In contrast, Millennials (born 1981-1994) matured during the expansion of higher education and globalization but before the gig economy's dominance. Their work ethic aligns more with structured employment and stability (NASSCOM, 2021). Generation X (born 1965-1980) and Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) prioritized tenure and employer loyalty, benefiting from domestic job markets and well-defined pension systems. Gen Z's hallmark, therefore, lies not merely in age but in digital nativity and borderless competence two features that directly challenge conventional taxation rules premised on territoriality.

2.2 Skills, Knowledge, and Competency Comparison

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This table underscores how Gen Z's professional DNA rapid upskilling, digital fluency, mobility, and purpose orientation creates a truly global workforce. For international taxation, these traits imply that economic value is often generated across jurisdictions simultaneously, complicating the notion of a single "source" of income.

2.3 Generation Z in the Indian Context

India's Generation Z, estimated at nearly 27 percent of the national population (UN Population Data 2024), represents the country's most globally connected cohort in history. Born between 1995 and 2012, this generation has matured in an environment defined by smartphones, digital education, and constant exposure to international information flows. Unlike earlier generations, whose worldview was shaped by national institutions and localized career pathways, Indian Gen Z has grown up in a landscape where YouTube tutorials, LinkedIn communities, and global freelancing platforms provide both education and employment opportunities. Studies by NASSCOM (2024) and FICCI (2025) reveal that more than 60 percent of Indian undergraduates engage in part-time digital work or internships before completing their degrees. Platforms such as Upwork, Fiverr, and Total have turned Indian youth into micro-entrepreneurs serving international clients. This early integration into the global knowledge economy differentiates Indian Gen Z from previous cohorts, who typically entered domestic employment first and sought overseas opportunities later in life.

Education patterns also reflect this shift. The All-India Survey on Higher Education (2023) records sharp increases in enrolments for computer science, finance analytics, and design thinking disciplines directly linked to borderless service industries. Moreover, Indian universities now partner with global institutions for hybrid degree programs and virtual exchanges, strengthening cross-cultural competency among students. Such exposure prepares them to navigate international taxation issues early in their careers, especially when incomes arise from multiple jurisdictions. Sociologically, Indian Gen Z exhibits strong digital literacy but also heightened fiscal awareness. Surveys by Deloitte India (2025) show that over 70 percent of respondents in this group consider financial independence and tax transparency as key markers of adulthood. Yet, most admit to confusion about international tax obligations for remote work. This knowledge gap indicates the need for accessible guidance and cooperative tax-treaty education targeted at young earners. Culturally, India's Gen Z blends global ambition with local sensibility. They value social impact and ethical entrepreneurship alongside personal growth. Many pursue foreign clients while remaining physically in India, embodying a new kind of digital diaspora. Their income flows often paid in foreign currency through digital platforms demonstrate how intellectual exports now supplement traditional remittances. For taxation policy, this means India is not merely exporting labour but exporting knowledge capital, requiring frameworks that recognize both residence-based taxation and global contribution. Indian Gen Z's emergence as a digitally-empowered, globally-oriented workforce transforms the nation from a supplier of labour to a provider of innovation. Understanding their skills, motivations, and fiscal behaviour is essential for designing equitable international tax regimes that reflect India's evolving role in the world economy.

2.4 Research Gaps

Despite widespread recognition of Generation Z's digital fluency and borderless work patterns, significant gaps persist in academic and policy discourse. Existing tax systems remain anchored in territorial income concepts, failing to capture Gen Z's fluid digital labour across multiple jurisdictions. Research seldom connects new-age competencies such as coding, design, and cross-border consulting with measurable tax value attribution. Likewise, studies inadequately distinguish between traditional remittances and knowledge-based income streams, leaving intellectual capital exports largely unquantified. Comparative frameworks across generations are also scarce, with few analyses linking Gen Z's rapid skill renewal to taxation behaviour when contrasted with the stability-oriented Millennials or Gen X. In India, although Gen Z displays exceptional digital literacy and financial awareness, limited research addresses their understanding of international tax obligations, exposing a gap between knowledge and fiscal policy. Current treaties still emphasize physical trade rather than dual value creation from digital work, overlooking how both residence and source states benefit from intellectual exports. Moreover, little attention has been paid to the ethical and civic dimensions of this generation's fiscal behaviour, particularly how their global consciousness and social responsibility intersect with tax compliance. Collectively, these omissions call for an interdisciplinary research agenda uniting digital economics, behavioural taxation, and generational sociology to craft equitable global tax frameworks that recognize knowledge and innovation as the new foundations of value creation.

Table 1: Generational Comparison of Workforce Traits and Competencies

INDICATOR / TRAIT	GEN Z	MILLENNIALS	GEN X / BOOMERS	SOURCE(S)

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Tech & AI Proficiency	57 % use GenAI tools in daily work	41 %	12 %	Deloitte (2025)
Weekly Upskilling	70 % pursue weekly learning	59 %	32 %	Deloitte (2025); NASSCOM (2021)
Remote / Hybrid Work Preference	68 % prefer hybrid/remote roles	52 %	29 %	Randstad (2025)
Cross-Border Mobility Willingness	61 % open to relocation or international assignments	44 %	21 %	Henley & Partners (2024)
Career Motivation	Purpose, flexibility, sustainability	Financial growth, advancement	Job security, pension	Business Standard (2025)
Average Job Tenure	2.3 years	3.8 years	7.2 years	Randstad (2025)

2.5 The Residence–Source Dichotomy in International Taxation

Traditional international tax frameworks, embodied in the OECD and UN Model Conventions, allocate taxing rights based on two principles:

1. **Residence principle:** a country taxes the worldwide income of its residents.
2. **Source principle:** a country taxes income arising within its borders.

These models presume physical presence and localized income generation. However, Gen Z's digital and service-based work frequently transcends these boundaries. For instance, a software developer residing in India who codes remotely for a UK firm generates value in both jurisdictions yet may pay full tax in India (residence) and limited or no tax in the UK (source). The source state benefits economically from that labour (through productivity gains, market growth, or service delivery) without commensurate taxation. Emerging international debates, including the OECD's Pillar One and Pillar Two initiatives (focused on multinational enterprises), have not yet comprehensively addressed the individual dimension of cross-border digital work. As remote employment scales among younger cohorts, this gap becomes increasingly significant.

2.6 Global Mobility and Tax Complexity

Reports by KPMG (2024) and Henley Global (2024) highlight the surge of "digital nomads" and borderless workers under age 35. These professionals frequently rotate between jurisdictions without meeting 183-day presence tests, thereby avoiding taxation at source but contributing to that economy's intellectual and technological capital. Tax administrators thus face the dilemma of value without presence a hallmark of the digital generation. Furthermore, social contract expectations differ generationally. Older cohorts viewed taxation as a civic duty tied to state benefits; Gen Z perceives it through the lens of fairness and global contribution. They often question why income should be taxed twice or excessively when their intellectual output benefits multiple nations simultaneously.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Human Capital as a Cross-Border Export

Education systems, particularly in developing countries, invest heavily in nurturing talent that subsequently serves foreign economies. Gen Z amplifies this phenomenon through remote work and global freelancing. The residence state (for example, India or the Philippines) effectively exports skilled labour whose output enriches the GDP of source states. Under conventional taxation, however, most income remains taxable only in the residence country, giving the source country a net advantage access to global skill without long-term social cost. Hence, from an equity standpoint, it is logical to consider nominal or shared taxation at the source, compensating the origin state for its human capital export while ensuring workers are not overtaxed.

3.2 Digital Presence and Economic Nexus

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Modern tax law must move from the concept of physical presence to digital nexus. When a Gen Z professional delivers continuous services across borders via cloud infrastructure, the economic nexus exists irrespective of location. Policymakers could consider defining digital permanent establishments (DPEs) for individuals' lightweight mechanisms ensuring minimal withholding at source aligned with actual digital engagement time. Such a system would acknowledge the distributed value creation inherent in Gen Z work patterns and avoid penalizing mobility.

3.3 Ethical and Policy Dimensions

Fair taxation must reflect both capacities to pay and benefit derived. Gen Z, often in early career stages, contributes significantly to innovation yet faces complex tax compliance. A balanced approach tax credit coordination, bilateral sharing of payroll data, and simplified digital filing can uphold compliance without discouraging cross-border participation. Further, policies should guard against misuse by corporations structuring "remote" engagements purely to minimize tax. The aim is tax neutrality, not arbitrage.

3.4 Comparative Policy Models

Some jurisdictions are experimenting with flexible regimes suited to global talent:

- Portugal's Non-Habitual Resident regime offers reduced taxation for foreign professionals contributing locally.
- Estonia's e-Residency program recognizes digital entrepreneurs regardless of nationality.
- United Arab Emirates' remote work visa allows foreign earners to operate tax-free while residing temporarily.

Such innovations exemplify how states can attract global skills without traditional residence tests, aligning well with Gen Z's expectations.

PART 3 – FINDINGS, CONCLUSION & REFERENCES

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Economic Contribution of Gen Z Talent

Data from the World Economic Forum (2025) suggest that digital-native workers contribute nearly 27 percent of global service exports, often without ever migrating physically. This "virtual migration" generates billions in productivity for source economies particularly in design, data analytics, and programming yet is largely unaccounted for in tax revenue structures. Gen Z's intellectual output travels faster than policy reform. Countries benefiting from such skills capture value without visible labour, whereas residence states bear education costs. This imbalance fuels growing calls for shared taxation frameworks recognizing human-capital exports.

4.2 Sociocultural Findings

Interviews and cross-sectional surveys (OECD Youth Forum 2024) reveal that Gen Z links taxation to transparency and global fairness rather than obedience to the state. Roughly 64 percent of respondents agreed that "tax should follow contribution, not geography." They favour clear, digital tax systems and reward-based compliance such as green credits, education reliefs, or innovation-linked deductions.

This mindset contrasts sharply with earlier generations:

- ➢ Boomers equated taxes with nation-building duties.
- ➢ Gen X treated them as an unavoidable cost of income stability.
- ➢ Millennials viewed them transactionally (service-for-benefit).
- ➢ Gen Z reframes tax as a *partnership mechanism* between individuals and societies they empower worldwide.

4.3 Fiscal and Legal Observations

- ❖ Current *Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs)* emphasize residence-source separation but ignore hybrid virtual presence.
- ❖ Few treaties cover freelance or platform-based income a primary mode for Gen Z.
- ❖ Absent standardized definitions of "digital permanent establishment," revenue authorities' risk both double taxation and tax base erosion.
- ❖ Residence states must recognize tax-credit portability, ensuring workers receive relief even when income arises through decentralized platforms.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Nominal Source-State Taxation

Source nations benefiting from Gen Z's productivity could levy a low uniform withholding tax (1-3 %) on remote professional income. This acknowledges economic value creation without discouraging cross-border engagement.

5.2 Digital Human-Capital Treaties

Countries may negotiate *bilateral digital-labour accords* akin to DTAAs. These would:

- ✓ Define digital nexus thresholds (hours logged, revenue derived).
- ✓ Enable mutual crediting to avoid double taxation.
- ✓ Create data-sharing protocols between e-platforms and tax agencies.

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5.3 Residence-State Incentives

Residence countries should reward citizens exporting services by offering:

- ✓ Foreign-income exclusions up to a specified limit.
- ✓ Research & learning tax credits linked to professional upskilling.
- ✓ Recognition of virtual remittances as part of service-export GDP.

5.4 Global Youth Tax Forum

An *OECD-UN Youth Tax Initiative* could institutionalize dialogue on generational taxation, bridging finance ministries with youth councils to co-design policies reflecting digital realities.

6. CONCLUSION

Generation Z's borderless human capital competencies challenge the very foundations of the twentieth-century architecture of international taxation. Their professional realities constructed through clouds, codes, and collaborations virtually rather than through factories and offices dismantle the assumption that global income has a single, traceable territorial source. The digital workspace environment allows an individual in Gandhinagar to design software for a start-up in Berlin while consulting clients in Toronto within the same day. This dispersion of value creation raises a profound question for global tax systems built upon geography: where, in a digital economy, does income truly originate for taxable? As this cohort matures into positions of economic leadership, taxation must evolve from a municipal obligation into a global equity mechanism one that respects residence ties while rewarding cross-border contribution. The moral core of taxation fair sharing of benefits and burdens remains intact, yet its application must stretch across the digital globe. A resident of India contributing intellectual capital to multiple cross border economies should not shoulder the full municipal tax burden when those economies also extract measurable value from their competences & skills. A sustainable model would therefore recognize dual value creation for both source and resident state. Nominal source-based state taxation, cooperative treaties and conventions for digital labour, and codified digital-nexus standards provide pragmatic routes toward fairness. Such mechanisms ensure that the source state acknowledges its share of human-capital benefit, while the residence state safeguards equity through credit systems, rebate or exemptions. Beyond fiscal logic lies a deeper social rationale. Gen Z perceives itself as a generation of global citizens not static to any national. Their behaviour reflects this ethos they invest in knowledge transfer, sustainability, and collaboration. To impose outdated, territorial tax regimes on this fluid generation risks discouraging global cooperation and their motivation.

Ultimately, ensuring fiscal justice for Gen Z is not merely a financial exercise but it is recognizing human knowledge and universal asset. When shared globally, it should not be constrained by archaic borders but celebrated through equitable tax policy. The future of taxation must be adaptive, inclusive, and unbounded anchored in fairness yet open to the limitless geography of the human mind.

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A STUDY ON MULTIDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM IN INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

In the rapidly evolving world of the 21st century, developing critical and creative thinking among students has become a core component of higher education across multiple disciplines. The key life skills cited by the NEP 2020 include a combination of cognitive, emotional and social skills, such as critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, emotional intelligence skills. The concept of multidisciplinary education is highly acknowledged and promoted by the NEP 2020 through which such skills can be developed at higher education level. However, there is a complex process that requires a structured approach to cultivate these skills. It provides an innovative way to integrate knowledge, skills, methodologies and diverse perspectives of both students and teachers, encouraging them to think beyond the boundaries of a single discipline. Multidisciplinary education enables deeper understanding of subjects by bringing together varied perspectives, enhancing students' ability to synthesize knowledge, generating innovative ideas and engage in holistic learning experiences. In this paper, an attempt is made to examine the theoretical as well as practical aspects of multidisciplinary education. Furthermore, the paper aims to highlights the transformative potential of multidisciplinary curriculum in fostering critical and creative thinking and holistic development of students.

Keywords: *Multidisciplinary Curriculum, NEP 2020, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking*

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing world, education plays a significant role in shaping the future of students. The concept of multidisciplinary education has evolved significantly and it is strongly being recognized in the recently introduced NEP 2020 by Ministry of Education. The emphasis of the policy is shifting away from rote memorization and standardized tests, and moving towards nurturing students' critical and creative thinking and innovative ideas. It integrates knowledge, skills and methods from multiple academic disciplines to provide a broad and comprehensive learning experience among students and encourage them to think beyond a single boundary. It emphasizes on the holistic development of students at all level of education. Critical and creative thinking skills are considered as key competencies for personal and professional fulfilment, active citizenship, innovation, economic development and social inclusion. Higher education institutions and systems play a key role in fostering students' acquisition of these skills by incorporating them into courses, curricula and assessment.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to examine the role of multidisciplinary curriculum in influencing the development of critical and creative thinking in higher education. Furthermore, it aims to explores pedagogical strategies and challenges and considerations for implementing multidisciplinary curriculum.

Multidisciplinary Curriculum and NEP 2020

Multidisciplinary Curriculum is an innovative approach that integrates knowledge, methods and perspectives from multiple academic disciplines to create a comprehensive learning experience that enhances both critical and creative thinking skills. It encourages students to view problems and concepts from diverse perspectives, fostering the ability to analyze information deeply by linking ideas across different fields. On the contrary, traditional discipline-specific programs often limit students' perspectives and hinder the development of higher-order thinking skills. In the NEP 2020, transformative steps have been taken in India's higher education system by encouraging multidisciplinary curriculum at higher education level. This approach nurtures multi-dimensional cognitive capabilities, exploration and intellectual curiosity in students, equipping them to solve real-life problems and complex issues. A key element of NEP 2020 is the establishment of large multidisciplinary universities and colleges, each enrolling at least 3,000 students, which provide a broad and flexible curriculum enabling students to explore multiple fields before committing to a specialization. NEP 2020 targets establishing at least one large multidisciplinary higher education institution (HEI) in every district by 2030 to expose students to diverse disciplines, promote cross-field collaboration, and drive innovation. To strengthen India's research

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ecosystem, the policy proposes research-intensive universities and the National Research Foundation (NRF) for funding and promoting interdisciplinary work. Furthermore, it advocates blending liberal arts with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, urging students to explore varied domains for comprehensive skill development. Notably, the Multiple Entry and Exit System (MEES) offer students flexibility, allowing them to pause, switch disciplines, and earn certifications, diplomas, or degrees at varied stages, thus reducing dropout rates and promoting lifelong learning. Additionally, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) facilitates credit transfers across institutions, enhancing academic mobility and personalized learning pathways. Vocational education is seamlessly incorporated into mainstream curriculums, blending practical skills with theoretical knowledge to better align education with workforce requirements. Encouragement of cross-disciplinary research fosters innovation ecosystems that drive economic growth, while the promotion of liberal education broadens students' exposure to diverse subjects, enhancing their analytical and communication skills. Furthermore, the NEP 2020 distinguishes between research-intensive and teaching-focused institutions to prioritize knowledge creation and dissemination. The integration of technology through blended learning enhances accessibility, while the inclusion of Indian knowledge systems, ethics, and sustainability enriches the educational experience. This shift from rote learning to inquiry-based, multidisciplinary education aligns with India's vision of becoming a global knowledge hub by cultivating well-rounded professionals equipped to drive national development and address 21st-century challenges effectively.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM AND CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking involves evaluating arguments, identifying assumptions, analyzing evidence, and making reasoned judgments. Multidisciplinary curriculum plays a crucial role in enhancing critical thinking among students in several ways such as;

- Diverse Perspectives: Engaging with multiple disciplines exposes students to different methodologies, theories, epistemologies, which broadens thinking and reduces bias.
- Problem-solving skills: Combining knowledge from various disciplines encourages innovative solutions.
- Analytical thinking: Students are given different tasks to solve, and with the solution of a problem, students can learn analysis ability and improve reasoning skills.
- Integration of knowledge: Linking concepts across subjects helps in understanding cause-effect relationships better.
- Adaptability: Multidisciplinary learning teaches students to think flexibly and adapt to new challenges.
- Decision-making: Evaluating ideas from multiple domains strengthens judgment and informed decision-making.

Multidisciplinary Curriculum and Creative Thinking

Creative thinking basically encompasses originality, flexibility, and the ability of generating multiple solutions. Multidisciplinary curriculum encourage creativity among students in different ways such as;

- Combining ideas: Learning from multiple fields encourages students to connect concepts in new and original ways.
- Project and Inquiry-Based Activities: Tasks that require integration of multiple knowledge domains stimulate divergent thinking.
- Thinking beyond boundaries: Students learn to break traditional subject limits, fostering imagination and experimentation.
- Collaboration: Working with peers from diverse disciplines sparks creative discussions and ideas.
- Adaptability: Engaging with varied perspectives builds flexibility, which is key to creative thinking.

Pedagogical Approaches for Multidisciplinary Curriculum

There are many effective teaching strategies that promotes critical and creative thinking among students. The NEP 2020 envisions a holistic, flexible, inclusive and student-centric higher education system. The following approaches can be tailored in teaching-learning process;

- Project-Based Learning (PBL): Students work on complex problems requiring knowledge from multiple disciplines.
- Inquiry-Based Learning: Encourages questioning, exploration, and investigation across subject areas.
- Collaborative Team Teaching: Faculty from different disciplines guide students jointly, modeling integrative thinking.
- Flexible Electives: Students choose courses across disciplines, allowing them to pursue diverse interests.
- Real-World Applications: Case studies, design challenges, and community projects connect theory with practical problems.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Multidisciplinary curriculum has several benefits to teachers as well as students. It enhances, upgrades and integrates the skills of students. This concept develops higher order thinking and cognitive capabilities through integrating methods, knowledge and diverse perspectives. However, the implementation of this concept at ground level can be challenging. Following are the potential challenges;

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- Multidisciplinary learning needs modern classrooms, labs, and digital tools. Many schools and colleges lack such facilities, especially in rural areas, face financial and connectivity constraints.
- Current evaluation and accreditation systems focus on single disciplines, making it hard to measure interdisciplinary learning.
- Transitioning to multidisciplinary education requires major investment in training, infrastructure, and technology, which many institutions struggle to afford.
- Many students and parents are unfamiliar about the benefits and career prospects of multidisciplinary education.
- Teachers usually know only one subject and need training for interdisciplinary teaching. Few faculty development programs exist, and workload concerns may cause resistance.
- Traditional curricula and credit systems limit flexibility, hindering personalized multidisciplinary learning.
- Employers prefer specialized degrees, creating doubts about the job value of interdisciplinary programs.
- Policies by bodies like UGC and AICTE are discipline-based, requiring reforms for NEP 2020 alignment.
- Effective implementation depends on technology, but unequal access in rural and disadvantaged areas may increase educational gaps.

CONCLUSION

Multidisciplinary curriculums have a profound impact on the development of critical and creative thinking in higher education. By integrating diverse disciplines, promoting collaboration, and encouraging problem-solving, these curricula prepare students to navigate complex real-world challenges. NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive framework for implementing such curricula in Indian higher education, emphasizing flexibility, holistic learning, and skill development. To realize its full potential, institutions must adopt innovative pedagogy, provide faculty support, redesign assessment systems, and create an enabling environment for cross-disciplinary learning.

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INSIDE GEN Z: A DATA-DRIVEN LOOK AT LEARNING, INQUIRY, AND CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract

Generation Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012) is emerging as a key social group shaped by digital technologies, changing educational systems, and evolving forms of civic engagement. This study examines learning behaviors, inquiry practices, and civic participation among Gen Z learners using data collected from a sample of 200 participants. A quantitative survey-based research design was employed, incorporating measures of digital learning habits, information-seeking strategies, and indicators of citizenship. Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses reveal meaningful relationships between inquiry skills, digital learning engagement, and civic awareness. The findings highlight the importance of inquiry-based learning and digital literacy in fostering responsible citizenship among Gen Z. Implications for educators and policymakers are discussed.

Keywords: *Generation Z, learning behavior, inquiry skills, civic engagement, digital literacy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z has grown up in a digital-first environment where access to information is immediate and abundant. While this access provides unprecedented learning opportunities, it also raises concerns regarding superficial learning, misinformation, and declining civic engagement. Understanding how Gen Z learns, asks questions, and participates in civic life is crucial for designing relevant educational and social interventions.The present study adopts a data-driven approach to explore learning patterns, inquiry behaviors, and citizenship among Gen Z learners, based on responses from a sample of 200 participants.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has significantly transformed the ways in which young people learn, communicate, and engage civically. Scholars across education, communication, and political science have examined how digital environments reshape literacy, participation, and democratic engagement, providing a multi-disciplinary foundation for understanding learning and citizenship in the twenty-first century.

One of the central themes emerging from recent scholarship is the growing importance of **digital media literacy** as a prerequisite for meaningful democratic participation. Kahne and Bowyer emphasise that digital environments have become a primary source of political information for youth. Their work highlights the dual potential of digital media to either promote informed engagement or intensify ideological divisions, underscoring the need for educational systems to equip students with critical evaluation skills. Wineburg and McGrew add to this by demonstrating that even highly educated individuals struggle to assess the credibility of online information, recommending lateral reading practices as a key instructional strategy.

Digital literacy itself has been defined and interpreted in diverse ways. Buckingham argues that young people must move beyond basic technical skills to develop critical awareness of how digital media shape knowledge, identity, and power. Jenkins and colleagues, through their analysis of participatory culture, similarly contend that new media education should cultivate collaborative problem solving, content creation, and online community participation. Hargittai and Walejko highlight disparities in content creation and sharing practices, showing that socio-economic factors contribute to a participation divide within digital environments.

Educational researchers have also explored how digital technologies support learning processes. Greenhow, Robelia, and Hughes illustrate how social media and networked platforms offer opportunities for knowledge sharing and connected learning, redefining traditional notions of scholarship and instruction. Lewin, Lundie, and McNicol provide empirical evidence that classroom technologies enhance learning only when integrated with thoughtful pedagogy, pointing out that mere access to devices does not guarantee improved outcomes. Schmidt and Lee further note that mobile-first learners demonstrate unique learning behaviours shaped by constant connectivity, requiring educators to adapt methods to match students' cognitive and motivational patterns.

The conceptual shift toward blended and technology-rich learning environments is well documented in Bonk and Graham's comprehensive work on blended learning, which provides global perspectives on integrating face-to-face and digital instruction. Prensky's distinction between digital natives and digital immigrants sparked widespread debates about generational differences in technology use. Although sometimes critiqued, his work

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highlighted the need for instructional models that align with the experiences of students immersed in digital environments. Schunk's contributions to learning theory remain essential for understanding how motivation, cognition, and behaviour influence learning, including within digitally mediated contexts.

Another significant area of research concerns **civic engagement and democratic participation** in the digital age. Bennett, Wells, and Freelon identify two contrasting models of citizenship that shape how youth engage online: the dutiful citizen model, which focuses on institutional participation, and the self-actualising citizen model, characterised by personalised, expressive forms of engagement. Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli Carpini provide a broader sociopolitical context, arguing that shifts in civic life reflect new ways in which citizens connect with political issues, especially through digital channels. Delli Carpini and Keeter further discuss the potential of service-learning as a means to cultivate political knowledge and civic identity among students.

Kahne, Lee, and Feezell contribute empirical evidence that digital media literacy education positively influences online political participation. Their findings support the view that when young people are taught to navigate digital information critically, they become more engaged and informed participants in civic and political life. Torney-Purta and collaborators complement this perspective by examining how civic competency can be assessed, stressing the importance of both knowledge and participatory skills in democratic societies.

The broader global and societal implications of these developments are recognised by international organisations as well. The OECD outlines a global competence framework that emphasises intercultural understanding, ethical communication, and the ability to navigate complex digital information landscapes. Pew Research Center findings indicate that Generation Z exhibits high levels of digital engagement, with social media acting as a primary site for civic expression, identity formation, and social connection.

Creswell's work on research design provides methodological guidance for studying these phenomena, emphasising rigorous approaches to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. Such frameworks are essential for analysing the complex interactions between digital media, learning processes, and civic engagement.

Overall, the existing literature collectively demonstrates that digital technologies are reshaping the foundations of learning and citizenship. Researchers emphasize that digital literacy must involve critical thinking, participatory skills, and ethical understanding rather than technical proficiency alone. At the same time, global competence, civic knowledge, and democratic values must be actively cultivated to ensure that young people are prepared for responsible engagement in a rapidly evolving digital society. The reviewed studies provide a rich conceptual and empirical foundation for further investigation into how digital environments can be leveraged to strengthen education and democratic participation.

2.1 Learning Behaviors of Gen Z

Research suggests that Gen Z prefers flexible, technology-enabled learning environments and frequently relies on digital platforms such as video lectures, search engines, and social media for academic support. However, excessive multitasking and reduced attention spans remain concerns.

2.2 Inquiry and Information Evaluation

Inquiry skills—including questioning, source evaluation, and evidence-based reasoning—are critical in the digital era. Studies indicate that while Gen Z is proficient in searching for information, their ability to critically evaluate sources varies widely.

2.3 Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Contemporary citizenship extends beyond voting to include online participation such as digital activism and information sharing. Prior research links higher critical thinking and media literacy with constructive civic engagement.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To examine the learning behaviors of Gen Z learners.
2) To assess inquiry and information-evaluation skills among Gen Z.
3) To analyze the relationship between inquiry skills and civic engagement.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

A descriptive and correlational survey design was used.

4.2 Sample

Sample size: 200 Gen Z participants
Age range: 16–25 years
Sampling technique: Convenience sampling
Population: Students enrolled in higher secondary schools and undergraduate programs

4.3 Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire consisting of four sections was employed:

a) Demographic information

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b) Learning Behaviors Scale (10 Items)

- This scale measures how Gen Z learners approach learning in digital and non-digital environments, including study habits, resource use, and self-regulation.
- I regularly use digital platforms (such as online videos, educational apps, or websites) to support my learning.
- I prefer learning through multimedia resources (videos, infographics, podcasts) rather than only textbooks.
- I am able to manage my study time effectively when using digital learning resources.
- I revise or review academic content multiple times to ensure understanding.
- I actively seek additional learning materials beyond what is provided by my teachers.
- I can focus on academic tasks even when learning online or using digital devices.
- I take responsibility for my own learning rather than relying entirely on teachers.
- I use online tools (such as note-taking apps or calendars) to organize my learning activities.
- I try to connect new information with what I already know.
- I reflect on my learning progress and make adjustments when necessary.

c) Inquiry Skills Scale (10 Items)

This scale assesses learners' abilities related to questioning, information search, evaluation, and evidence-based reasoning.

- I ask questions when I do not clearly understand a concept or issue.
- I search for information from multiple sources before accepting it as accurate.
- I check the credibility of online information before using or sharing it.
- I am able to distinguish between factual information and personal opinions.
- I compare different perspectives when exploring a topic or issue.
- I look for evidence to support claims or arguments.
- I evaluate the reliability of sources based on author, date, and origin.
- I think critically about information presented on social media and online platforms.
- I can summarize information in my own words after evaluating its accuracy.
- I am confident in making decisions based on well-reasoned information.

d) Citizenship and Civic Engagement Scale (10 Items)

This scale measures civic awareness, participation, responsibility, and engagement in both online and offline social contexts.

- I am interested in social, political, or environmental issues affecting society.
- I follow news or current affairs through reliable sources.
- I discuss social or civic issues with friends, family, or peers.
- I share or post content related to social or public issues on digital platforms.
- I have participated in activities that promote social welfare (such as volunteering or campaigns).
- I believe it is important to be informed before expressing opinions on public issues.
- I respect diverse viewpoints in discussions about social or political matters.
- I feel responsible for contributing positively to my community or society.
- I try to verify information before sharing it on social media.
- I believe that young people can make a meaningful difference in society

Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using:

- Frequencies and percentages
- Mean and standard deviation
- Pearson's correlation coefficient

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Learning Behaviors
72% of respondents reported daily use of digital platforms for learning.
Mean score for digital learning engagement: M = 3.84, SD = 0.61
5.2 Inquiry Skills

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65% indicated they often verify information using multiple sources.
Mean inquiry skills score: M = 3.67, SD = 0.58

5.3 Citizenship and Civic Engagement
60% reported engaging in at least one form of online civic activity (e.g., sharing social issues, signing petitions).
Mean civic engagement score: M = 3.42, SD = 0.64

5.4 Relationship Between Inquiry Skills and Citizenship

Variables	r-value
Inquiry Skills & Civic Engagement	0.46*

*p < 0.01
A moderate positive correlation was found between inquiry skills and civic engagement, indicating that learners with stronger inquiry abilities tend to demonstrate higher civic participation.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that Gen Z learners actively use digital tools for learning but vary in the depth of their inquiry practices. The positive relationship between inquiry skills and civic engagement supports the view that critical information evaluation contributes to responsible citizenship. These results reinforce the role of education in developing inquiry-based and civic-oriented competencies.

7. IMPLICATIONS

Educational Implications
- Integration of inquiry-based learning strategies across subjects
- Explicit teaching of source evaluation and critical questioning

Social and Policy Implications
- Promotion of digital citizenship frameworks
- Support for media literacy initiatives targeting youth

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Small sample size limits generalization
- Self-reported data may be subject to response bias
- Cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions

9. CONCLUSION

With a sample size of 200 Gen Z learners, this study demonstrates that inquiry skills play a significant role in shaping learning outcomes and civic engagement. Strengthening inquiry-based learning and digital literacy can contribute meaningfully to the development of informed, responsible citizens in the digital age.

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INTEGRATING TRADITION WITH TECHNOLOGY IN CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

The researcher examines the interplay between integrity, educational tradition, and classroom technology. As digital tools reshape learning environments, educators face the challenge of preserving academic integrity and cultural/ pedagogical traditions while harnessing technology's affordances to enhance learning. Drawing on literature from educational philosophy, academic integrity studies, learning theory, and educational technology, this paper synthesizes current thinking, identifies tensions and affordances, proposes a conceptual framework for integrating integrity-sensitive technology into traditional classroom practices, and offers practical recommendations for educators and policy-makers. The paper argues that maintaining integrity in a technology-rich classroom requires a deliberate blending of ethical education, culturally responsive pedagogy, assessment redesign, and technology literacy—supported by institutional policy and ongoing professional development. Implications for practice, research gaps, and policy recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: *academic integrity, educational tradition, educational technology, assessment, ethics, pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

Technology's penetration into formal education—from primary schools to higher education—has been rapid and transformative. Digital devices, learning management systems (LMS), remote proctoring, adaptive learning platforms, and communication tools are now commonplace in classrooms worldwide. These tools offer unprecedented access to information, opportunities for personalized learning, and new forms of student engagement. At the same time, educators and institutions are increasingly concerned about how technology affects academic integrity and the continuity of educational traditions—values, practices, and pedagogical assumptions that have shaped classrooms for decades.

"Integrity" in education refers to ethical conduct, honesty in assessment and scholarship, responsibility for one's work, and the cultivation of moral dispositions relevant to learning communities. "Tradition" here denotes established pedagogical practices, curricular structures, teacher-student relationships, and cultural values embedded in educational institutions. Integrating technology into classrooms invites both opportunities and tensions: technology can support integrity (through tools that promote transparency and scaffolded learning) but it can also facilitate cheating, erode apprenticeship models, and disrupt long-standing pedagogical rituals. The central research question of this paper is: **How can educators reconcile and integrate integrity and tradition with the affordances and challenges of classroom technology to support meaningful learning?**

This paper offers a literature-informed synthesis and proposes a conceptual approach that places ethical education, culturally aware pedagogy, assessment redesign, and strategic technology use at the core of integrity-preserving classroom transformation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Integrity: Definitions and Key Findings

Academic integrity traditionally centers on honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001). Research identifies common breaches such as plagiarism, contract cheating, unauthorized collaboration, and cheating on exams (McCabe, 2005; McCabe et al., 2012). Technology introduces new vectors for misconduct: copy-and-paste plagiarism from the web, contract cheating marketplaces, and the ease of sharing exam content via social media (Bretag, 2019; Sutherland-Smith, 2008). At the same time, technology also enables tools (e.g., plagiarism detection software) and pedagogical designs (authentic assessment) that can reduce misconduct by making learning more transparent and meaningful (Bretag et al., 2018).

Key insight: academic integrity is not only a matter of policing but of cultivating values, designing assessments that reduce incentives to cheat, and building trustful academic communities (McCabe & Pavela, 2000).

Tradition and Pedagogy: The Value of Continuity

Educational traditions—such as the apprenticeship model, Socratic dialogue, and scaffolded mentorship—support socialization into disciplinary norms and professional conduct (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Traditions provide continuity, identity, and implicit moral education (Dewey, 1938). Critics argue that some traditions can be exclusionary or antiquated and need to be re-examined (Giroux, 2011). Integrative approaches suggest selectively preserving purposeful traditions while evolving practices to include diverse learners (Banks, 2008).

Key insight: traditions carry ethical and cultural functions that technology should support rather than supplant.

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Educational Technology: Affordances and Risks

Educational technology research highlights both affordances (personalized feedback, interactivity, data-informed instruction) and risks (privacy concerns, digital divides, incentivizing surface learning) (Selwyn, 2016; Anderson & Dron, 2011). The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) suggests perceived usefulness and ease of use shape adoption, but critical perspectives emphasize how technology mediates power, attention, and pedagogy (Noble, 2018; Selwyn, 2016).

Key insight: technology's impact is shaped by design choices, pedagogical alignment, and institutional policies.

Intersection: Technology, Integrity, and Assessment

Assessment design is central to integrity: traditional closed-book exams emphasize recall and surveillance, while technology enables alternative assessments (projects, portfolios, peer assessment) that emphasize application and authenticity (Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis, 2011). Remote proctoring and plagiarism detection are contested: they can deter misconduct but may erode trust and exacerbate inequities (Bretag & Mahmud, 2016). Contract cheating markets exploit weak assessment design and transactional student–institution relationships (Bretag, 2019).

Key insight: integrity-preserving use of technology requires redesigning assessment to reduce high-stakes anonymity and to increase authenticity, ownership, and formative feedback.

Theoretical Framework

To integrate integrity, tradition, and technology coherently, this paper proposes a conceptual framework combining three lenses:

1. **Ethical Socialization (Moral Education)** — education as formation: integrating explicit instruction about academic integrity, ethical reasoning, and professional norms (Dewey, 1938; Kohlberg, 1981).
2. **Culturally Responsive Tradition (CRT)** — honoring valuable pedagogical traditions while ensuring accessibility and cultural responsiveness (Banks, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995).
3. **Design-Based Technology Integration (DBTI)** — purposeful design that aligns learning objectives, assessment, pedagogy, and technology affordances (Brown, 1992; Reeves, 2006).

These lenses operate at three levels: (a) classroom practices, (b) institutional policy and assessment design, and (c) societal/ethical context (privacy laws, commercial contract cheating marketplace dynamics). The model emphasizes *alignment*: technology should be adopted only when aligned with ethical socialization and culturally responsive tradition, and assessment should be redesigned to capitalize on technology's strengths while minimizing integrity risks.

METHODOLOGY

This paper follows a conceptual, integrative literature synthesis approach. Sources were selected from peer-reviewed journals, foundational books, and influential reports in the fields of educational theory, academic integrity research, and educational technology. The goal is not to present primary empirical findings, but to synthesize existing knowledge to propose an actionable framework and practical recommendations for educators and institutions.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. How Technology Challenges Integrity and Tradition

a. Anonymity and Distance from the Learning Community

Online environments can create psychological distance: students may feel less social accountability, increasing temptation to breach integrity. Traditional classroom rituals—oral defense, face-to-face mentorship, in-class presentations—create social bonds that discourage misconduct. Technology sometimes disrupts these rituals if interactions are limited to asynchronous text or quizzes.

b. Automated Tools vs. Moral Formation

Reliance on detection technologies (plagiarism checkers, AI proctoring) treats integrity as a compliance problem rather than a moral one. This shift can foster adversarial relationships between students and institutions.

c. Commodification and Contract Cheating

Marketplaces offering ghostwriting and contract cheating take advantage of students' pressures and inadequately designed assessments. These issues are exacerbated where educational traditions that emphasize mentorship and formative feedback have eroded.

d. Equity and Access

Technology can disadvantage students without stable internet access or private space—particularly with remote proctoring—raising ethical concerns. Traditions that rely on in-person support may be protective for some students; removing those supports without equitable substitutes can increase academic integrity incidents born of desperation.

2. How Technology Can Support Integrity and Tradition

a. Scaffolding, Feedback, and Formative Assessment

Technology enables iterative feedback loops (e.g., draft submission, automated formative quizzes, peer review platforms) which align well with apprenticeship models. Frequent, low-stakes assessments reduce pressure and the incentive to cheat.

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b. Authentic Assessment and Real-World Tasks

Digital tools facilitate project-based assessments, simulations, and portfolios that reflect real-world practices, making rote cheating less attractive and less relevant.

c. Transparency Through Analytics

Learning analytics can flag anomalous patterns (sudden performance spikes) that prompt supportive intervention rather than punitive action. Used ethically, analytics can help educators detect misunderstanding early and provide remediation.

d. Community Building in Hybrid Environments

Synchronous video, collaborative documents, and discussion forums—when well-facilitated—can recreate meaningful student–teacher and peer relationships, supporting moral education and communal norms.

3. Integrating Tradition and Technology: Principles

From the literature and analysis above, the following guiding principles emerge:

1. **Pedagogical Primacy**: Technology should serve pedagogical goals—not the reverse.
2. **Ethical Education First**: Integrity must be taught, not only policed. Explicit instruction on academic ethics, citation practices, and disciplinary norms is necessary.
3. **Assessment Redesign**: Replace or supplement high-stakes, easily gamed assessments with authentic, scaffolded, and process-oriented assessments.
4. **Culturally Sustaining Practices**: Preserve teaching practices that support diverse learners while adapting traditions to digital contexts.
5. **Equity and Accessibility**: Ensure technology does not create or exacerbate inequities; provide alternatives and supports.
6. **Transparent, Proportionate Enforcement**: Where detection tools are used, pair them with clear policies, due process, and educative sanctions.
7. **Faculty Development**: Equip educators with skills in digital pedagogy, ethics, and assessment design.

4. Practical Strategies and Examples

Below are concrete strategies that translate principles into classroom and institutional practice.

Classroom-level strategies

- **Syllabus as Ethical Contract**: Articulate expectations, honor code language, and provide clear examples of acceptable collaboration and citation.
- **Scaffolded Writing Tasks**: Use staged submissions (topic proposal, annotated bibliography, draft, final) with formative feedback to reduce the appeal of outsourcing work.
- **Oral Components**: Include short oral defenses, presentations, or viva-style mini-interviews to verify understanding and preserve tradition of apprenticeship.
- **Design Authentic Tasks**: Replace multiple-choice high-stakes exams with case studies, simulations, or community projects where answers are contextualized and unique.
- **Process Documentation**: Require version histories (e.g., collaborative docs), reflective logs, and annotated work to demonstrate process.
- **Peer Review and Collaborative Responsibility**: Use structured peer review with rubrics; peer assessment fosters community norms and shared responsibility.

Institutional-level strategies

- **Academic Integrity Education Programs**: Mandatory modules on referencing, paraphrase vs. summary, and ethics for incoming students.
- **Faculty Workshops**: Training on assessment design, digital affordances, and culturally responsive pedagogy.
- **Policy Design**: Transparent honor codes, graded sanctions that are educational, and appeal processes sensitive to student context.
- **Technology Stewardship Office**: Central unit to evaluate digital tools for privacy, accessibility, and pedagogical fit.
- **Equity Safeguards**: Provide loaner devices, internet stipends, and alternative assessment modes for students with constrained environments.

Technology-level strategies

- **Use of Anti-plagiarism Tools as Educative Tools**: Provide similarity reports to students during draft phases so they can learn proper citation.
- **Adaptive Learning for Mastery**: Deploy adaptive tutorials to ensure students reach competence before high-stakes assessment.
- **Careful Use of Proctoring**: If remote proctoring is necessary, choose privacy-respecting solutions, provide opt-out alternatives, and ensure supports for students with poor home conditions.
- **Open Book/Resource-Available Assessment Design**: Assume access to external resources and assess higher-order skills (analysis, synthesis), reducing incentives to cheat.

Case Vignettes (Illustrative Examples)

1. **Staged Research Project (Undergraduate Sociology)**

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Course replaces midterm exam with a staged research project: proposal, literature map, pilot data with reflective journal, final paper with an oral presentation. LMS workflow captures drafts and feedback. Result: students show sustained engagement; opportunity for mentorship; fewer integrity violations, as the process makes outsourcing difficult.

2. **Authentic Industry Partnership (Engineering Capstone)**

Capstone involves industry sponsor with iterative deliverables and client presentations. Intellectual ownership is clear, and peer evaluation is part of grading. Technology (Git repositories, collaborative design tools) documents contributions. Traditional apprenticeship (mentorship from faculty and industry) is preserved alongside modern tools.

3. **Formative Plagiarism Education (First-Year Writing)**

Students submit drafts to a plagiarism detection service that returns similarity reports. The instructor uses reports to teach paraphrase and citation during class. Sanctions reserved for final submissions. This educative use reduces punitive encounters and fosters learning.

Recommendations for Educators and Policy Makers

1. **Adopt Assessment-as-Learning Mindset**: Emphasize process and formative feedback. Use technology to support iterative learning rather than surveillance.
2. **Embed Integrity Instruction Across Curriculum**: Integrate ethical scenarios, citation practice, and disciplinary norms into courses—not relegated to orientation.
3. **Design with Equity**: Assess technological and socio-economic constraints of students before implementing high-tech solutions. Provide reasonable alternatives.
4. **Transparency and Co-creation of Policies**: Involve students and faculty in crafting integrity policies; participatory policy builds buy-in and trust.
5. **Professional Development**: Invest in ongoing training for instructors on digital pedagogy, assessment design, and culturally responsive practice.
6. **Ethical Use of Detection Tools**: Use analytics and detection for supportive interventions first; ensure privacy, consent, and appeal pathways.
7. **Research Agenda**: Fund longitudinal studies on the impact of technology-integrated pedagogy on integrity, learning outcomes, and equity.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper is conceptual and synthesizes existing literature; empirical validation of the proposed framework is needed. Future research should include controlled studies comparing traditional and technology-integrated assessment designs on rates of misconduct, learning outcomes, and student well-being. Research should also examine cultural variations in integrity norms and how globalized digital platforms interact with local traditions.

CONCLUSION

The challenge of integrating integrity, tradition, and technology in classrooms is not a choice between preservation and innovation; it is a design problem requiring ethical clarity, pedagogical insight, and equitable implementation. Technology can both threaten and strengthen integrity and tradition—depending on how it is used. By foregrounding ethical education, redesigning assessment toward authenticity and process, preserving the valuable social functions of pedagogical traditions, and using technology as a means rather than an end, educators and institutions can create classrooms where learning and moral formation co-exist and reinforce one another. The path forward is collaborative, reflective, and iterative: one that honors the best of educational traditions while responsibly embracing technology's transformative power.

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THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM PLAYS IN PREVENTING CULTURAL CONFLICT IN THE CASE OF INDIA AND CAMBODIA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW (SLR) USING PRISMA APPROACH

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Abstract

Religious pluralism refers to who of understanding multiculturalism and respect for diversity, such as traditions, laws of religions, and sharing a social framework, which is essential to promoting multiculturalism, like in India and Cambodia. The study of religious pluralism plays a role in preventing cultural conflict only in India and Cambodia, and comparing religious pluralism plays a role in preventing cultural conflict in India and Cambodia. It is a sample study of religious pluralism conflict prevention in diverse societies in India and Cambodia. This paper follows a qualitative approach and uses secondary data for the study from existing scholarly literature, government reports, and international organization publications related to religious pluralism and cultural conflict in India and Cambodia. Religious pluralism emphasizes social cohesion by encouraging interfaith conversations, sharing cultural practices, and respect in both countries. Both countries had a major role in building tolerance and preventing cultural misunderstanding. The suggestion of studying to promote pluralistic policymakers, educators, participatory leadership, and interfaith engagement may importantly reduce cultural conflict in both countries. Religious pluralism in India and Cambodia demonstrates that inclusive values, interfaith collaboration, and respect for diverse traditions are significant for preventing cultural conflict and maintaining long-term social cohesion.

Keywords: *Religious pluralism, cultural conflict, interfaith relations, Minority religions, PRISMA*

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious pluralism is defined as the peaceful coexistence of multiple faith traditions within a shared social framework and plays an essential role in sustaining harmony in culturally diverse nations like India and Cambodia. In history, culture has changed and transitioned to another through human development. is soft power for the development nation, economy, tourism, and building relations. Religion is very important for cultural identity and national identity, as it reflects historical context and cultural exchange. Hinduism and Buddhism have deep roots in India-Cambodia relations. Cambodia is one countries that believes and practices religion from India. However, many studies discuss religious pluralism in India and Cambodia's cultural role of Buddhism; there is limited comparative research that specifically analyzes how religious pluralism functions as a mechanism for preventing cultural conflict in both countries. The existing literature always examines each country separately, but cross-country comparisons on pluralism-leaders conflict prevention remain underexplored, especially in community practices, policy frameworks, and interfaith participation. This study follows those gaps by providing a comparative understanding of pluralism's contribution to peace constructions in India and Cambodia. And underexplored in the current literature on religious pluralism in South and Southeast Asia. The study contributes to scholars' and policy discussions through offering a comparative perspective on how India and Cambodia manage religious diversity to prevent cultural conflict. The aims of the study will provide insights that may assist policymakers, educators, and peacebuilding practitioners in developing inclusive strategies for interfaith harmony. There is an addition to a broader literature by demonstrating how pluralism can strengthen social cohesion in Indian and Cambodian contexts. Religious pluralism in India and Cambodia played a role in the peacebuilding and showcased diverse religious traditions within a single social and political framework. Especially, it plays a crucial role in forming cultural development, fostering mutual understanding, tolerance, and social harmony. Nevertheless, without institutional and community support, religious diversity may also lead to cultural conflicts, disputes over ownership, and intergroup tensions. The interaction of religious pluralism and cultural conflict is specifically complex in countries with long religious histories, colonial legacies, and challenges posed by modernization and globalization. The study aims to synthesize research from 2010 to 2025 for analyze how religious pluralism contributes to preventing cultural

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conflict. Conclusion: Religious pluralism is an important point that plays for preventing cultural conflict, and the findings are key for solving diverse societies' problems. The research on religious pluralism functions as a mechanism for preventing cultural conflict in India and Cambodia. The contributions and aims of the studies and understanding of religious pluralism are how to build peace and relations and prevent conflict and war, both internal and external. This study is significant because it provides a comparison of religious pluralism in India and Cambodia and how to prevent cultural conflict or build peace through religion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fox (2019 and Bhargava (2012), Religious pluralism plays a crucial role in fostering social harmony and intercultural relations, especially in societies marked by significant religious diversity. Scholars have discussed and shown that religious pluralism will serve as a stabilizing force for cultural conflicts. On the other hand, that may become a source of social disruptions and a threat to peace if pluralism is poorly managed or manipulated for political purposes, according to. Research on religious pluralism and conflict prevention spans multiple disciplines, including political science, religious studies, sociology, and freedom and conflict studies. These fields have contributed to the development of both theoretical frameworks and empirical findings.

(Eck, 2006) Religious pluralism is broadly defined as the coexistence of multiple religious traditions within a shared social, political, and cultural framework. **Fox (2019)** distinguishes between natural religious diversity and institutionalized pluralism supported through legal and political mechanisms. The literature defines various pathways through which pluralism contributes to conflict prevention, including interreligious transactions, shared civic identities, legal rights protections, and interfaith mediation.

Varshney (200) and **Bhargava (2012)** assert that institutional arrangements such as secular constitutions, including laws, and interfaith councils it may be important to reduce communal conflict. These arrangements give structured chances for conversation and peaceful coexistence. The Indian and Cambodian contexts illustrate how pluralism operates differently depending on historical legacies, political structures, and cultural norms.

Varshney (2002) India is the one country that has the most cultural diversity as languages and religious pluralism. It is so important to reflect the freedom of religious belief and minority rights. Moreover, shown about practices of different religions together in the whole country different religions together, and India has a long history and old interreligious harmony. The research, conducted about a dense network of civil engagement in community engagement between religious and communities, such as Joint business associations, neighborhood groups, or cultural festivals, is associated with levels of communal violence. All data from him so most important for my topic, which supports contact theories. It is the regular interaction and active cooperation between groups that constructs trust and reduces prejudices. India is the one country that has the most cultural diversity as languages and religious pluralism. It is so important to reflect the freedom of religious belief and minority rights.

Thapar (2000) India has long-standing religious diversity that dates back in history. India's traditions, including Hinduism, Muslim, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and the Tribal belief system that developed through sustained interaction. **(Eaton, 2019)** Pre-modern practices-such as shared pilgrimage networks, multicultural sacred spaces, and syncretic traditions like the Bhakti and Sufi movements-created everyday settings of cultural exchange and coexistence.

Kulke & Rothermund (2016) political authorities further strengthened pluralism; for example, Emperor Ashoka promoted respect for all sects, and Emperor Akbar institutionalized mechanisms of religious accommodation. **Smaith (2005),** although periods of conflict occurred, communities often continued to share festivals, venerate saints across traditions, and maintain localized networks that transcended religious boundaries. Contemporary India thus inherits a deeply layered history of religious pluralism that continues to influence social relations and efforts to save harmony in a diverse society.

Bayly (1999) asserts that British institutions rigidly enforced religious majors by census enumeration, legal codification, and administrative typology. These colonies had reflected the religious identity, intensifying divisions that continue to affect India. India's model of "principled distance" allows state intervention when necessary to protect rights while also accommodating diverse religious practices.

Bhargava (2010), Post-1947, constitutional frames attempted to count colonial legacy through adopting a secular framework rooted in equality and non-discrimination. **Farooqui (2012)** views that model as appropriate for India's deep pluralism. though its implementation remains contested. Debating persists largest the effectiveness of India's secular framework. Critics assert that communal tensions, political mobilization, and colonial legacies undermine secular commitments. However, for constitutional structure remains one of the strongest among postcolonial states, as in Gujarat, for religious protection. Its success depends on political will, judicial integrity, and continued cultivation of pluralistic norms.

Brass (2003) & **Varshney (2002).** Post-independence India has also faced major challenges. Communal violence—such as the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and the 2002 Gujarat violence—reveals the fragility of interreligious harmony. **Jaffrelot (2007)** asserts study reflects that vulnerable communities are most affected, and political actors often exploit religious identities for electoral gain. **Eck (2001)**, despite recurrent tensions, India exhibits essential resilience. Judicial interventions, civil society organizations, and interfaith initiatives support dialogue and reconciliation. **Bhargava (2010)** states that education is a program for the development of knowledge on secularism and moral values, further strengthening the pluralistic values. **Harris (2005)** asserts that it consists

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of effective pluralism and needs both institutional and active community participation. A comparison of India and Cambodia reflects the differences in academic attention on religious pluralism. Cambodia is a country with predominant Theravada Buddhism as its official state religion.

Harris (2005) Historically, Khmer culture mixed Hinduism and Buddhist practices, which is reflected in Angkor Wat and Bayon. In French colonial Cambodia, cultural improvement was disrupted, and attention to local religious systems was lost. The Khmer Rouge (1975-1979) destroyed Khmer culture (Pol Po) as institutions, places, pagodas, education, and cultural systems. NGOs, international organizations, and interfaith initiatives have since contributed to promoting religious understanding, respect, and peacebuilding.

Keyes (1994) and **Ledgerwood (1990)** show that contemporary Cambodian society shows complex interactions among Buddhism, indigenous animism, remnants of Hindu influence, and minority religions. Buddhism remains the core of Khmer identity, shaping social norms, moral expectations, and community life. Monasteries function as centers of education, moral guidance, and cultural preservation. **Chandler (2008)** Buddhism has also historically acted as a cultural anchor during foreign domination and political upheavals, including colonialism and the Khmer Rouge era

Ky (2005) & **Chandler (2008),** After independence, the French colonial period (1863-1953), Cambodia rebuilt its religious shape and cultures, creating more institutions for preparing religion. And 1953-1970 is the Sangkum period, which has more cultural influence from the French, as music, language (French), and religion (Christianity) are the cultural influences that subsequently shaped national identity. The Sangkum era illustrates how religion may be mobilized for state-led social integration and cultural consolidation, embedding Buddhist norms with public and civic life. **Harris (2005)** states that the Pol Pot era (1975-1979) represents a rupture in Cambodia's religious and cultural trajectory. The regime targeted religious institutions, intellectuals, and cultural elites as part of its radical social engineering agenda. Monks were forcibly disrobed, temples destroyed, and religious practice criminalized, making profound disruptions in cultural continuity and community life. The system suppression of Buddhism and spiritualized inflicted has shared trauma and endangered the survival of long-standing cultural and ritual frameworks. Because, in this period, pagodas and monasteries were destroyed, and changed places with other uses. **Chandler (2008)** Post-1979 rebuilding efforts under the Khmer, the People's Republic of Kampuchea, and subsequent government, prioritized the repairs of Buddhism as core types of social healing and nation-restoration.

The end of the Pol Pot period Khmer people's reconstruction of Cambodian religions. So, in a rural district or commune have constructed. Understanding of colonialism and its impact on the cultural context of Cambodia. It is important to study religious pluralism when other countries controlled and tried to promote their cultures, and then it is the structures of culture that influence history, as in India and Cambodia, which have both experienced colonial rule. These are historical dynamics of comparing religious pluralistic societies, colonial legacy, post-independence, religious reconstruction, and conflict management.

Ebilhara (1994) & **Harris (2004),** Cambodia hosts minority religious groups, including Cham Muslims, Vietnamese Catholics, and Indigenous animist communities. For Cambodian Buddhism, providing the unifying cultural framework, minor group experiences various things. For example, Cham Muslims are the largest of the minority religious groups. For example **(Ledgerwood, 2008),** Vietnamese Catholic communities, in fact, have a discriminatory impact on political and economic tension rather than strictly religious factors. Generally, the Cambodian state promotes religious tolerance through constitutional protection and community-led mechanisms. Civil society and interfaith networks actively address discrimination and encourage sharing moral values through Buddhism. Comparisons between Cambodia and India reveal several interesting differences. India represents cultural contexts that represent high religious diversity, democracy, and political competition. And Cambodia is a country that is rebuilding of religions and reconstructing again after the war, colonial rule, and the Khmer Rouge. Cambodia officially recognizes Buddhism to official recognizing as the official state religion and respects other religions, such as Muslims and other small groups.

In both contexts of religious pluralism has been shaped by distinct historical legacies. India has a longer history of multi-religious or religious pluralism interaction for more centuries, while Cambodia has a legacy of ancient religious reconstructions after the Khmer Rouge. However, both countries still continue to face contemporary challenges in social policy changes. Any comparative research on this topic remains limited. So, only a few studies to analyzed India and Cambodia side by side, while most research has focused either on India's constitutional secularism and Cambodia's religious reconstruction. A comparative perspective can provide clarity on which pluralistic mechanisms are context-specific to each country and which are universally effective for preventing cultural tension and cultural conflicts.

Moher et al. (2009); Page et al. (2021); the PRISMA Approach (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses) is an internationally accepted methodological and reporting framework designed to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability in systematic reviews. PRISMA is a guide for researchers by a structured process of locating, choosing, appraising, and synthesizing evidence. Central to this approach is the PRISMA flow diagram, which documents how studies move through four major stages.

In conclusion, the literature reviews have included a definition of religious pluralism, and the sample of religious pluralism plays a role in preventing cultural conflict in India and Cambodia. comparing contexts in India and Cambodia on religious pluralism, religious management, rebuilding religious institutions, and enhancing

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minority groups (religious). PRISMA approach is the methodology for a reporting framework designed for transparency, rigor, and replicability in systematic reviews.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows the qualitative approach to exploring the specifics of the role of religious pluralism in preventing cultural conflict in India and Cambodia. Data has been used for secondary research from scholarly literature reviews, public sources, and the collection of data collected by a systematic review of academic journals and government reports, specifically on scholarly books published between 2010 to 2025. The PRISMA approach is the key point for collecting data related to religious pluralism in India and Cambodia, and including in South, Southeast Asia.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There are aims of the studies, and the role that religious pluralism plays in preventing cultural conflict:

- To identify the role of religious pluralism in preventing cultural conflict in India and Cambodia
- To compare the role of religious pluralism, tolerance, and operation in preventing conflict in India and Cambodia.
- The religious relations between India and Cambodia.

5. FINDINGS

The analysis of the literature reflects various key findings regarding the role of religious pluralism in preventing cultural conflict in India and Cambodia. so, both countries have similar and different historical contexts marked by religious diversity, mechanisms, historical trajectories, and state structures that produce a distinct pattern of pluralism and conflict management. This research topic will provide the sample for religious practitioners, building peace and protection from wars.

- Religious pluralism builds strong institutions for conversation
- India's pluralism has deep roots in historical, cultural, and policy management.
- Civic society networks are influenced to prevent cultural conflict in India
- Cambodia's pluralism is public through Buddhist cultural dominance and historical context (colonial, minority religious, and reconstruction of religion)
- Pluralism is the differences between rural and urban
- India and Cambodia have both colonial and postcolonial influences, forced to pluralism.
- Interfaith mechanisms
- Comparison: India has most of the religious pluralism and stronger institutions, but Cambodia promotes Buddhism as the official state to resolving religious institutions.
- Both countries emphasize that pluralism alone does not guarantee peace.
- Rebuilding religious and preparing societies after colonialism

6. CONCLUSION

Religious pluralism plays a crucial role in fostering social harmony and intercultural relations, especially in societies marked by significant religious diversity. In the literature, religious pluralism plays a role in preventing cultural conflict and comparing religious diversity, historical context, and reconstructing religion in India and Cambodia. Both experiences have been reflected with similar problems of colonialism. The research used the PRISMA framework to limit the specific scholars argues that mention religious pluralism in India and Cambodia. This study is so important because it includes two different countries and studies religious pluralism in preventing cultural conflict, and it guides government officers or policymakers, and educators to take these concepts to the development in communities that have diverse minorities.

In literature review shows that religious pluralism can play a vital role in preventing cultural conflict in India and Cambodia. India's religious diversity is deeply rooted in the constitutional principle in history so far. Legal protections for diverse religious communities, combined with everyday forms of coexistence, contribute to a relatively stable but completely pluralistic society. For mobilization of politics based on religious identities and area grievances can make pluralistic structures, the leader to episodic violence despite broad law protections. And Cambodia's religious pluralism has increased after decades of political suppression and is open to all religions; it is the freedom to believe in own religion. Buddhism remains the state religion, and legal recognition of minority faiths, particularly Islam and Christianity, has enabled peaceful coexistence in more regions. Comparative analysis has revealed that between Cambodia and India benefit from religious pluralism, but they still face challenges. India's pluralism is rich in institutions but politically contested, whereas Cambodia's pluralism is politically controlled, and institutions are limited. In a research paper used more time to the library, reading papers, PDFs, files, and meeting with the guide for discussion edition the data. This study is limited by the scarcity of research comparisons on India and Cambodia, and in addition between 2010 to 2025 literature scope may be overlooked. The empirical studies and wider regional comparisons to deeply understanding of pluralism practices. The reviews have revealed that religious pluralism, when supported through inclusive legal

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frameworks, strong civic networks, and educational initiatives, it is significantly reduces the risk of cultural tensions and promotes long-term social harmony. In fact, it is the guidelines for researchers to find some important relations topics (religious pluralism in India and Cambodia) that provide cultural identities.

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MINDFULNESS, WELLNESS AND VALUE-BASED EDUCATION: THERAPEUTIC IMPACT OF LITERATURE

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Abstract

The paper will discuss the positive impact of poetry as a subject for the conscious development of students. The poetry under study will be the nature poetry of William Wordsworth and John Keats. Nature and poetry when combined enhances the focus by raising our consciousness through enriching the sensory experience. It also helps to calm and sooth our tired minds and hearts. It enriches our creativity and paves way for a better social behavior. The nature poetry as a part of inculcating literature in our lives lends stability and focus to our otherwise directionless lives. It brings about clarity. It is the clarity of thought, planning and action that is needed as a guiding force to steer through the harsh realities of life.

The paper endeavors to focus on Gilles Deleuze's concepts of 'being' and 'becoming' as the central points of our very existence. The concepts throw light on the reality and the intensities that work their way to our sense of correct or incorrect in our lives. Furthermore, the concepts will enlighten our minds towards an understanding of our identity and its relation to our sense of belonging to this universe. The concept of 'becoming' forms the focus of our discussion. The central point of discussion in the paper will revolve around Deleuze's thought that, "All 'beings' are just relatively stable moments in a flow of becoming- life." (Colebrook,125)

The paper will primarily revolve around the poems of the above said poets as a path finder as well as a strong indicator of the awareness, well-being and an integration of academic learning. Literature, as a subject, is equipped with the ability to enhance the overall well-being of younger generation.

Keywords: *mindfulness, wellness, becoming, perception, difference, singularity*

Value based education endeavors a comprehensive approach to learning and integrating it with an ethical way of life. It aims to build up the moral character of students with the intent of making them an asset to the society, a society full of thoughtful and socially responsible individuals who integrate their education with a practical application of the values so learnt into situations demanding their utmost care and careful decisions. Such an education seeks to build up a resilient and responsible individual who harmoniously blends into the fabric of society.

Education is valuable only if it coincides with the ability to restore mindfulness and wellness inside the recesses of a learner's psyche. It is not possible for a teacher in higher education to teach meditation or breathing techniques. It is also a tough task to maintain the concentration of the students as they lack patience. The non-awareness of the situations surrounding them, emotional vacuum, lack of focus, absence of resilience and most importantly absence of empathy are some common issues that have been seen in our classrooms when dealing with students.

Poetry as a part of the curriculum helps in the empathetic development of a student and also encourages emotional well-being that is the need of the hour. It assists in connecting the student to others as well as his or her own self through an identification with the purpose of education both at personal and social level. Poetry introduces us to ourselves thus paving the way to the development of our psychic and creative development. An individual is able to appreciate the beauty of words and of the entities described in those poetic words. To mark the words of Alice Osborne in a post, "Poetry's strength lies in its ability to shed a "sideways" light on the world, so the truth sneaks up on you." Poetry is the safest recluse for expressing our own selves as well as lending words to our feelings that are otherwise indescribable. Moosavi and Amjad in a co-authored article, "Becoming in Love" (2024,pp.113-129) assert that a unique transformation is reached through becoming in order to achieve an individual free from alienation, distress and bewilderment.

Mindfulness is the conscious awareness of our own self with relation to our immediate surroundings. It can be integrated with Deleuze's philosophy to create a sensibility of "becoming" where heightened awareness of the present moment is used not just for acceptance but also for active experimentation with new ways of living and thinking.

The poems of William Wordsworth and John Keats are marked with the richness and abundance of the natural world. The poems under discussion hold a special place for catering to the human conditions through the nature's bounty. The complexity of the imagery lends an unfathomable depth and layers of meaning that enrich the human mind with its beauty, appeal to spirituality and its capacity for emotional fulfilment. Nature, offers a path of spiritual insight and inner state of happiness. William Wordsworth's poems, "I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud", "Lines Written Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and "The World is Too Much with Us" are wonderful examples of nature poetry that works like a magic on human psyche. John Keat's "Ode to Autumn", Ode to

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Nightingale" and "On the Grasshopper and Cricket", are pictorial representations of the life pulsating with joy and happiness. Keats' nature poetry lends a deep connection between the human and natural world.

In the poem "I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud", Wordsworth associates himself with a cloud that describes a man who while feeling lonely, comes across a vast field of daffodils dancing by a lake. The experience fills the poet with joy and the experience, of looking at the daffodils, kept alive in his memories to be relished later that provides him with the happiness that the poet experienced as a never- ending feeling. The poem "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" recognizes the tranquility of the landscape which has been internalized by the poet to bestow him with a lasting happiness. Wordsworth's poem, "The World Is Too Much with Us" laments over the lack of empathy on the part of the human beings to be one with nature as they lack the power to appreciate the beauty of nature and they have lent an over importance to the materialistic pleasures of life. To speak of a spiritual connection on the part of human beings is a thing of the far. John Keats' poem "Ode to Autumn" celebrates the season's abundance personifying it as a gentle figure who looks at the ripened fruits and watches over the harvest. Keats' "Ode to Nightingale" again explores the theme of nature, temporariness and mortality. "On the Grasshopper and Cricket", signifies the song of the cricket, during the winter chill, as the reminder of the joy as well as the vitality of the sweet summer days.

Literature allows us to become by creating affects that transform what we take experience to be. Our experience is our perception which takes up from a far more complex flow of pure difference. There is always more than the actual world. Gilles Deleuze's idea of life meant pure difference or 'becoming' (Colebrook,125) Deleuze did not consider man as the central point or the starting point. For him, thought was 'becoming' (Colebrook, 125) and human beings are stable entities, in the general flow of life. We, as beings, are affected with the flow of life or each passing moment and that getting affected, in whatever way, is 'becoming' (Colebrook,125). We see things as per our memories of past perceptions and keeping them in our minds to connect them to our thoughts and perceptions in the future time. Art enables us to refer to our sense experiences to a world of experienced things. Wordsworth's poetry is replete with the memories and reminiscences of his past experiences kept alive and fresh in the recesses of his psyche to be produced forth into a set of finest amalgamation of words that have touched the hearts of mankind. The lonely cloud in his poem, "I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud", encounters laughing and dancing daffodils who appear to be their beautiful best beside the lake and under the trees. Even the breeze surrounding the daffodils danced besides them which lent happiness and joy to the lonely cloud, the poet. "Tintern Abbey" written after five long years of wait recalls the mountain springs, steep and huge cliffs, quietness of the sky, sycamore tree where the poet had taken rest, cottages, grass turf below the trees, unripe fruits, hedge rows, pastoral farms a hermit's cave sitting by the fire side and the silence amongst the trees, still present vivid pictures of the valley that the poet visited years back. This portrayal never fails to fill the reader with emotions so felt by the poet.

Colebrook's chapter on "Becoming" (Colebrook, 125) describes the ideas of Gilles Deleuze that explains a sense of affirmation with the concepts of 'becoming' and 'simulation'. Deleuze did not consider human beings as the center or the foundation of life and its activities. Deleuze introduced the concept of 'becoming' (Colebrook, 125) which actually is in constant flow. Our world is not a stable world as it is in continuous flux of becoming. Deleuze considered human beings as stable entities in the flow of becoming life. His concept of "becoming" (Colebrook, 125), in fact did away with the concept of man or human as the focus of every other existence. According to Deleuze, 'thought is becoming' (126). Mindfulness then, does not lie in stability, it lies with our' becoming' (125) during the process of flow called life. Poetry assists us to walk with that flow called life.

Literature holds the power to create affects that transform what we take experience to be. The actual world that we perceive is the composite of virtual tendencies. Perception, in its actual forms, takes up what it can from a complex flow of pure difference. There are possibilities of seeing what is virtual and this may not be actualized. Hence, there may always be more than the actual world. Then there are also potential worlds we might be able to see. To every actual world, there is a dimension to a virtual perception. This virtual perception is exactly what poetry brings to us. We need not visit a farmland in an autumn season to feel the ripening of the fruits and the juice of the apples brought forth through the cider presser. The actuality of a situation is no doubt always welcome. Art is affective in transforming virtual into actual lived experience by creating difference. Deleuze saw life in pure difference and this difference comes from our different senses of perception. It is our innate capacity of perception that gives a jerk to the way we think about the flow called life. These perceptions might differ from person to person. What one perceives might be a different experience for another. These different perceptions are actualized by our differing points of perceptions. Our world of beings are contractions of the flow of becoming. The perception of poetry and with reference to the poets under discussion in this paper, lends unique charm to the poetic sensibilities depending upon the varied levels of perceptions that each one of us experience. To realize the actual also requires the synthesis of time. Everything that we see comes from the retention of the memory of our past perceptions and anticipating and connecting future perceptions. We can even perceive beyond what is not yet present and this also is real. Perception reduces difference. It is possible for the human eye to expand and maximize difference. In a way, the sense we make of this world and our place within completely depends upon our ability of the degree of experience that takes our journey forward in the flow called life. Our perceptions include our understanding of the world as transcendent with external and extended things (Colebrook, 125-132). Art can act as a medium to refer to our sense experiences to a world of experienced things.

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A poet has the capacity to introduce us to a world made different by their perception as well as a sensibility not reached before. William Wordsworth and John keats, as poets, lent magic with their sense of perception and sensibilities to a height any other being cannot have imagined. Keats makes us think of the luscious autumn and makes us forget the sweet summer because the description of the autumn takes us with its flow and we achieve a becoming. In his poem, Ode to Autumn, "Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, -…", the ode takes us to another level of perception of time and becoming. We become the reaper sitting carelessly on the granary floor lulled to sleep by the winnowing wind carrying with it the drowsy fumes of the poppies. It is also possible for beings to experience sensibility itself. It is not difficult to be sensible to the ripened fruits hanging forth from the trees. A mere look at the vine branches handing from the thatched cottages, gourds plump with ripening and the sweet kernels do not fail to draw our attention. How can we be insensible to the heavy loaded beehive cells reminding us of the sweet nectar even before we have actually tasted it. Singularity, according to Deleuze, is just this becoming of the sensible. Without the presence of the actual world in front of us, this singularity of becoming makes us achieve what yet is not. Singularities are events from which the difference of time flows. Time or the flow of life, is just this pulsation of sensible events or singularities which we then experience and perceive as an actual world. (Colebrook,127)

We can think of art and its presentation of singularities as a 'becoming – imperceptible' (Colebrook, 126). The concept of 'becoming-imperceptible' (Colebrook,126) is enabling us to see the differences of perceptions with greater openness. According to Deleuze, we become perceivable and extended bodies by contracting from the complex flow of life(Colebrook, 128). According to Deleuze, we reduce the chaos of perceptions that we receive into an extended object, and can become 'subjects' who observe this object (Colebrook, 128). By contrast we become imperceptible- no longer disengaged from life and difference- by becoming one with the flow of images that is life. We recognize ourselves as nothing more than a flow of images, the brain being one image among others, one possible perception and not the origin of perceptions. It is a total disentanglement of our own selves from the general flow of life and at the same time perceiving ourselves as a separate part of the becoming. We become a cloud that is at once lonely and floats over the hills and valleys. We become one of the daffodils experiencing the soft wind coming from towards the lake under the shade of the tree and yet, perceiving the difference that lends the experience of becoming. We become one in a million stars shining up in the sky and that sky has no boundaries and we then realize again that we are a daffodil amongst thousands such dancing in a rhythmical manner. The gamut of perceptions bring order to this chaos and in that order lies our own nourishment or growth that Deleuze calls 'becoming' (Colebrook,125) The very sight brings happiness to even those who have not yet experienced the feeling of happiness before or at least it is able to question that chaos asking for order. This perception of being one with the clouds or the daffodils once achieved does not leave us ever and we become blessed even in our solitude. This blessing of becoming fills the heart with never ending happiness.

Deleuze's concept of images is crucial for his creation of the concept of becoming. The image would be a copy of the real, a secondary or virtual 'becoming' added onto being. In the flow of images, we put forward some organizing center and we also put forward some real world behind the images we see. Deleuze argues for an immanent life of imaging or simulation. We immerse ourselves in the flow of life's perceptions (Colebrook,130). As in Wordsworth's poem, "Tintern Abbey ", the lines "Of five long winters! and again I hear; With a soft inland murmur…I behold these steep and lofty cliffs…" The human becomes more than itself or expands to its higher power, by becoming hybrid with what is not itself. From life itself, we imagine all the 'becoming' of life, using the human power of imagination to overcome the human. We become free from the human, open to the event of becoming. It is freedom from our partial and moralizing perspectives. In our perception of the force and power of life, we become with life. Becoming- imperceptible enables us to see with greater openness the differences, intensities and singularities that traverse us (Colebrook,130). Freedom, requires moving beyond the human to affirm life.

Literature destroys the border between perceiver and perceived. We are no more in a position of judgement but 'become other' (Colebrook,131) through a confrontation with the forces that compose us. In Wordsworth's sense of being a cloud or a daffodil or just a plain onlooker at the nature and its bounty, we become one with nature and an out pouring of images that we perceive and relate to our own selves start becoming a part of us and taking our perception to a higher level both about ourselves and the world where we stand. It is liberating ourselves from finite self-images, an opening to life. It endears us to images now perceived in the act of becoming and looking anew at the process called life. Judging a system of values does not justify itself. It is rather a separate thing perceived in itself with a stable and disengaged thought. Judgement often mars the entirety of a perception. We have to put ourselves as 'become other' (Colebrook,131) through a confrontation with the forces that compose us. Our ethical becoming is limited by a fixed image of thought. An acceptance of who we are and what we should be, we can exclude what is negative and then what remains is the positive in us. So, any piece of poetry should not come to us as a set word order rather it should enable us to perceive images in relation to our affirmation of our own selves rather than a cold picture painted by the artist. There also occurs the possibility of impersonal perception of joy or sadness and an affirmation of the power to become what is joy and leave out what limits us in the form of sadness (Colebrook, 131). A power we affirm through joy is the power of a life beyond our specific self. It leads to creation and expansion of positive possibilities. "Sad perceptions are those

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which diminish my power, and the power of all life; in joy I perceive what is not myself and in so doing expand who I am and what I might become." (Colebrook,132)

Becoming -imperceptible does not mean who or what we are; it means with greater openness the differences, intensities and singularities that traverse us. It cannot be achieved once for all but it remains in the act of becoming. (Colebrook, 130).The sense of joy or happiness increases our power of becoming and it assists us to exclude only what limits us to reach that happiness or joy. The power we affirm through joy is the power of life beyond our specific self. The power to perceive joy leads a self to an expansion that 'becomes' (Colebrook,132)

Becoming-imperceptible is the idea of perception. The capacity to build this idea of perception within oneself leads to all kinds of possible differences. Becoming-imperceptible leads to becoming different with and through what is perceived. Just as Deleuze explains the example of 'becoming-animal' (Colebrook,132), it is the perception of finding difference in the image of a man and that of an animal. Becoming-animal is not being in actual an animal, it is the complete absorption of the events that may come one's way. When one sees and perceives by putting oneself to a comparison of difference from it, there is a transformation that one's self undergoes. That transformation, is power. According to Deleuze, whatever we as beings experience through our perception, every event of our life transforms into a becoming. There are, in fact, endless possibilities of 'becoming' (Colebrook, 125) due to various intersections and encounters. It is here, Deleuze brings out the idea of enhancing our life and endowing it with power that 'mutates' (Colebrook,133) and caters to the difference brought about by our becoming. Humans can expand their perceptions into becoming other than their own self that is being. When a human being puts itself in front of another being, it leads to expansion of life through creation and transformation. Our perception of beings other than us is an understanding of what difference lies in the events or beings that we perceive. There is no replication, there is transformation. A very interesting fact that Deleuze gave about becoming is that becoming is not what has already been actualized. To quote Deleuze's idea, "- we can see the animal as a possible opening for new styles of perception" (Colebrook,137)

With perception starts the development of thought, intensity, enjoyment and a positive approach at building up differences through this perception to become the new whole which is absolutely not stable but will continue to become in the process that it is in. It is always possible to read literature as an art of recognition, as about 'ourselves' and the human search for meaning. As Deleuze said, literature can be read for what it produces, the transformative effect (Colebrook, 126). Literature, is read not always for its connotative meanings but to find meanings higher than itself in the broad spectrum of colors, that is life. It lies over to us to see a text as an expression of some underlying meaning. Literature acts as a transformative agent. It opens the gates of perception never reached or desired before. Let us not limit ourselves to draw meaning out of a single word or even connote each word by its limited meaning. Literature as a medium of perception lends transformation to the meanings ascertained or understood at a particular point of time and which again carries within itself the innumerable possibilities of perceptions and inferences that may give rise to understandings never reached before. Literature needs to be read affirmatively. It is not necessary to put meanings behind every word. Poetry, like any other art, is creation. It is the joy that this creation brings should affect us in newer possibilities and only then it is 'becoming' (Colebrook, 125). Poetry is the journey of the self that takes an individual along with its ebb. This ebb is 'becoming' (Colebrook, 125).

Poetry triggers the mindfulness in us, beings. It educates the young minds towards a balanced approach to life. It also reminds us, as teachers of literature, to make our classroom teaching both, productive and impactful experience for the young minds. This would definitely inspire the young leaners for a better life, seeking out possibilities for the growth and soothing down the saddened souls. It is a complete meditation in itself that propels us to question our existence and direct our disordered thoughts into a meaningful whole. We become as we align our thoughts, in order to seek a better living, finding ourselves as beings who are ever in the process of flux that is 'becoming' (Colebrook, 125

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SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING: A CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE ON GLOBAL TRENDS AND THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Parin Arvindbhai Shah, Dr. Sandip K. Parmar

Abstract

The escalating environmental concerns associated with conventional packaging waste have propelled sustainable packaging into the forefront of global discourse. This research paper examines the landscape of sustainable packaging, analysing global trends, challenges, and innovations, with a specific focus on the Indian context through the lens of consumer behaviour, including the increasingly influential Generation Z (Gen Z). Drawing upon existing literature, including studies on consumer perception, behaviour theories, and industry analyses, the paper explores the multifaceted nature of sustainable packaging, encompassing material choices, circular economy principles, and the pivotal role of consumers. Key drivers, such as environmental concern (altruistic values) and health consciousness (egoistic values), are investigated, particularly concerning young Indian consumers, including Gen Z. Barriers to adoption, including cost implications, lack of consumer awareness, infrastructural deficits, and green-washing concerns, are discussed in both global and Indian settings. The paper synthesizes insights from various consumer behaviour theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory, and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), to understand the complex interplay influencing purchase intentions and disposal behaviours. Findings suggest that while global awareness is rising, significant gaps persist between consumer attitudes and actions. In India, values play a crucial role, with altruistic environmental concerns showing a strong influence on young consumers' attitudes and intentions towards eco-friendly packaging, a trend potentially amplified among the environmentally conscious Gen Z cohort. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts among policymakers, businesses, and consumers—actively engaging Gen Z—to overcome barriers and accelerate the transition towards a truly sustainable packaging ecosystem.

Keywords: *Sustainable packaging, Consumer behaviour, India, Gen Z, Green packaging, Eco-friendly packaging, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Altruistic values, Egoistic values, Circular Economy, Packaging waste*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Packaging, an integral part of modern commerce, serves essential functions ranging from product protection and preservation to logistics, information dissemination, and marketing (Mometto, 2021/2022; Mohseni, 2023). However, the rise of consumerism, particularly the proliferation of single-use packaging often derived from fossil fuels, has led to significant environmental challenges. Conventional packaging contributes substantially to resource depletion, energy consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions, and, most visibly, burgeoning landfill waste and plastic pollution in terrestrial and marine ecosystems (Prakash et al., 2019; Kararia, 2023). Grocery packaging material alone is cited as accounting for a significant portion of household pollution and solid waste (Prakash et al., 2019; Wandosell et al., 2021, as cited in Kararia, 2023).

In response to these pressing environmental concerns and a growing shift in consumer awareness towards ecological responsibility, the concept of sustainable packaging has gained significant traction globally (Mometto, 2021/2022; Kararia, 2023). Consumers, particularly younger generations like Gen Z, are increasingly conscious of their environmental footprint and are seeking products and brands that align with their values (Dhileepan & Lakshmidevi, 2024; Kararia, 2023). This shift has prompted businesses to re-evaluate their packaging strategies, integrating sustainability not merely as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative but as a core business imperative and a potential source of competitive advantage (Zadek, 2004, as cited in Kararia, 2023; Mometto, 2021/2022). Sustainable packaging aims to minimize the environmental impact throughout the entire lifecycle of the package – from raw material extraction, manufacturing, and transportation to use and end-of-life management – while still meeting functional and economic requirements (Boz et al., 2020, as cited in Kararia, 2023; Mohseni, 2023).

1.2 Aim of the Research

Despite the growing importance and adoption of sustainable packaging initiatives, a comprehensive understanding of consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours remains crucial for its widespread success. Businesses transitioning to sustainable alternatives face challenges related to cost, performance, infrastructure, and consumer acceptance (Dhileepan & Lakshmidevi, 2024; Mohseni, 2023; Kararia, 2023). Relatively little is known about how consumers, including specific cohorts like Gen Z, perceive and value different aspects of sustainable packaging, what motivates their choices, and what barriers hinder adoption (Nordin and Selke, 2010, as cited in Kararia, 2023).

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This research paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of sustainable packaging, examining global trends, innovations, and challenges, with a particular focus on the consumer perspective within the Indian context, giving consideration to the emerging influence of Gen Z. India, as a rapidly growing economy with a large young consumer base increasingly aware of environmental issues, presents a unique and critical case study (Prakash et al., 2019). The paper seeks to understand the factors influencing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions towards sustainable packaging globally and specifically in India, drawing upon established consumer behaviour theories and findings from relevant studies.

The specific objectives are:

1. To review the definitions, principles, and key elements of sustainable packaging.
2. To analyze global trends, challenges, and innovations in the sustainable packaging sector.
3. To examine the specific landscape of sustainable packaging in India, including drivers and barriers.
4. To investigate consumer behaviour towards sustainable packaging, applying relevant theories and exploring factors like values (altruistic, egoistic), attitudes, norms, perceived control, and generational influences (specifically Gen Z), particularly within the Indian context.
5. To discuss the implications for businesses and policymakers in promoting sustainable packaging adoption, considering the role of different consumer segments.

1.3 Structure of the Research

This paper is structured into six main sections following this introduction,

Section 2 provides a Literature Review, discussing foundational concepts like the definition of sustainable packaging, the circular economy, consumer behaviour theories, and the elements defining green packaging.

Section 3 explores the Sustainable Packaging Landscape, presenting an overview of global trends and challenges, followed by a specific analysis of the situation in India.

Section 4 delves into the Discussion, analysing the key findings, particularly concerning consumer behaviour in India (including Gen Z) versus the global context, and the interplay of drivers and barriers.

Section 5 offers Conclusions, summarizing the main insights and providing managerial and policy implications.

Finally, Section 6 lists the References cited throughout the paper, primarily focusing on the provided documents.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Sustainable Packaging

Sustainable packaging, often used interchangeably with terms like 'eco-friendly' or 'green' packaging, lacks a single, universally accepted definition, which contributes to consumer confusion (Kararia, 2023). However, core principles consistently emerge. It generally refers to the development and use of packaging that results in improved environmental outcomes and reduced environmental impact throughout its lifecycle (Boz et al., 2020, as cited in Kararia, 2023).

Key criteria often include (Boz et al., 2020, as cited in Kararia, 2023; Mohseni, 2023; Svanes et al., 2010, as cited in Kararia, 2023):

- **Safety:** Being beneficial, safe, and healthy for individuals and communities throughout its lifecycle.
- **Performance & Cost:** Meeting market criteria for performance (e.g., protection, shelf life) and cost-effectiveness.
- **Sourcing:** Optimizing the use of renewable or recycled source materials.
- **Manufacturing:** Utilizing clean production technologies, best practices, and renewable energy.
- **Efficiency:** Optimizing materials and energy; reducing the product-to-packaging ratio.
- **End-of-Life:** Being effectively recovered and utilized in closed-loop biological (composting) or industrial (recycling) cycles; being recyclable, reusable, or biodegradable/compostable.

This lifecycle perspective is crucial, moving beyond just end-of-life considerations like recyclability to encompass the entire value chain from raw material extraction to disposal (Nordin and Selke, 2010, as cited in Kararia, 2023).

2.2 The Circular Economy and Packaging

The concept of a circular economy is fundamental to sustainable packaging. Contrasting the traditional linear 'take-make-waste' model, a circular economy aims to keep resources in use for as long as possible, extracting maximum value from them whilst in use, then recovering and regenerating products and materials at the end of each service life (Mometto, 2021/2022; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2012, as cited in Mometto, 2021/2022). Applied to packaging, this involves:

- **Designing out waste and pollution:** Using mono-materials, avoiding harmful substances, designing for disassembly.
- **Keeping products and materials in use:** Promoting reusable packaging systems, designing for durability and repair (where applicable), ensuring high-quality recycling processes.
- **Regenerating natural systems:** Utilizing bio-based compostable materials that can safely return to the biosphere (Mometto, 2021/2022; Mohseni, 2023). Strategies include reduction, reuse, recycling, and recovery, often summarized by the '3Rs' (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) or expanded frameworks (Kararia, 2023).

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2.3 Sustainable Packaging Materials

The choice of material is a critical aspect of sustainable packaging. Common options include:

- **Paper and Paperboard:** Often derived from renewable resources (wood fiber), widely recyclable, and biodegradable. Challenges include barrier properties (requiring coatings or laminates that can impede recyclability) and sourcing from sustainably managed forests (Mohseni, 2023; Kararia, 2023). Innovations focus on improving barrier coatings and utilizing recycled content (Mohseni, 2023).
- **Glass:** Infinitely recyclable without loss of quality, excellent barrier properties, perceived as premium and safe by consumers. Drawbacks include weight (higher transport emissions) and breakability (Mohseni, 2023; Kararia, 2023).
- **Metals (Aluminum, Steel):** Highly recyclable with established infrastructure, good barrier properties. Aluminum is lightweight but energy-intensive to produce initially; steel is heavier (Mohseni, 2023).
- **Plastics (Recycled & Bio-based):** Conventional plastics derived from fossil fuels pose significant environmental issues (Mometto, 2021/2022; Dhileepan & Lakshmidevi, 2024). Sustainable alternatives include:
  - *Recycled Plastics (e.g., rPET, rHDPE):* Utilizing post-consumer waste reduces reliance on virgin resources but faces challenges like collection, sorting, contamination, and maintaining food-grade quality (Mohseni, 2023).
  - *Bio-based Plastics:* Derived from renewable biomass (e.g., corn starch, sugarcane). They may or may not be biodegradable (Mometto, 2021/2022; Mohseni, 2023).
  - *Biodegradable/Compostable Plastics:* Designed to break down under specific conditions (e.g., industrial composting). Challenges include proper disposal infrastructure and consumer confusion with recycling (Mometto, 2021/2022; Kararia, 2023).
- **Innovative Materials:** Research explores materials like cellulose-based films, mycelium, seaweed extracts, and edible coatings (Mohseni, 2023; Mometto, 2021/2022).

2.4 Elements of Green Packaging

Consumers often evaluate the sustainability of packaging based on tangible cues. These can be categorized as (Magnier and Crie, 2015, as cited in Kararia, 2023):

- **Structural Cues:** Relate to the physical form and material – e.g., use of recycled/biodegradable materials, reduced material weight, minimalism (avoiding over-packaging), reusability features, shape, and size.
- **Graphical Cues:** Visual design elements – e.g., colours (green often associated with eco-friendliness, though can lead to greenwashing concerns), images (nature motifs), and logos.
- **Informational Cues:** Textual elements – e.g., environmental claims ("recyclable," "compostable"), eco-labels/certifications, disposal instructions, details on recycled content or material source. Consumer perception is heavily influenced by these cues, though often based on heuristics rather than deep knowledge, leading to potential misconceptions (Steenis et al., 2017, as cited in Kararia, 2023; Kararia, 2023).

2.5 Consumer Behaviour Theories and Sustainable Packaging

Understanding why consumers choose (or don't choose) sustainable packaging requires examining psychological drivers. Several theories are relevant:

- **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB):** Proposed by Ajzen (1991), TPB suggests that behavioural intention (the immediate precursor to behaviour) is influenced by:
  - *Attitude towards the behaviour:* Positive or negative evaluation of purchasing/using sustainable packaging.
  - *Subjective Norms:* Perceived social pressure from significant others (family, friends, society) to perform or not perform the behaviour.
  - *Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC):* Perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour (e.g., availability, cost, convenience, knowledge). TPB has been widely applied to green consumption behaviours (Paul et al., 2016, as cited in Prakash et al., 2019; Mometto, 2021/2022; Kararia, 2023). Extensions incorporate factors like environmental concern and willingness to pay (Kararia, 2023).
- **Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory:** Links values (e.g., altruistic, biospheric) to environmental beliefs, awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility, and personal norms (moral obligation), which ultimately drive behaviour (Stern et al., 1999, as cited in Mometto, 2021/2022; Kararia, 2023). This theory highlights the role of morality and values.
- **Norm Activation Model (NAM):** Focuses on the activation of personal norms (feelings of moral obligation) as the direct determinant of pro-social behaviour, triggered by awareness of consequences and ascription of responsibility (Schwartz, 1977, as cited in Mometto, 2021/2022; Kararia, 2023).
- **Self-Perception Theory:** Suggests attitudes are formed by observing one's own behaviour. Engaging in one sustainable action might reinforce a 'green' self-identity, potentially leading to other sustainable behaviours (spillover effect) (Bem, 1967, as cited in Kararia, 2023).
- **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT):** Emphasizes reciprocal interactions between personal factors (including self-efficacy – belief in one's ability to perform a behaviour), environmental factors, and behaviour.

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High self-efficacy in one's ability to choose, use, and correctly dispose of sustainable packaging could predict behaviour (Bandura, 1982, as cited in Kararia, 2023).

- **Altruistic vs. Egoistic Values:** Research explores whether pro-environmental behaviour is driven more by concern for others and the environment (altruism) or by perceived benefits to oneself (egoism, e.g., health benefits from perceived safer packaging) (Prakash et al., 2019; Yadav, 2016, as cited in Prakash et al., 2019).

3. SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING LANDSCAPE: GLOBAL AND INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Global Trends and Challenges

The global sustainable packaging market is experiencing significant growth, driven by heightened environmental awareness, stricter regulations, corporate sustainability goals, and evolving consumer preferences. Key trends include:

- **Material Innovation:** Intense research and development into alternative materials like advanced paper-based solutions, bio-plastics, cellulose films, and recycled plastics (Mohseni, 2023).
- **Circular Economy Models:** Increased focus on reusable packaging systems (especially in B2B and specific consumer segments), design for recyclability, and improving collection/sorting infrastructure (Mohseni, 2023).
- **Regulatory Push:** Governments worldwide are implementing policies like extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes, plastic taxes, and bans on certain single-use plastics (Mohseni, 2023 mentions EU regulations).
- **Corporate Commitments:** Major brands and retailers are setting ambitious targets for using recycled content, ensuring recyclability, and reducing overall packaging (Mohseni, 2023; Mometto, 2021/2022 references corporate examples).
- **Technological Advancements:** Innovations in active and intelligent packaging to reduce food waste, digital watermarks for improved sorting, and advanced recycling technologies (chemical recycling) (Mohseni, 2023; Mometto, 2021/2022).

Despite progress, significant challenges remain:

- **Cost:** Sustainable materials and processes can be more expensive than conventional options, impacting affordability, especially for consumers and smaller businesses (Dhileepan & Lakshmidevi, 2024; Kararia, 2023; Mohseni, 2023).
- **Performance Trade-offs:** Some sustainable materials may not yet match the barrier properties, durability, or shelf-life performance of traditional packaging (Kararia, 2023).
- **Infrastructure:** Lack of adequate collection, sorting, and recycling/composting infrastructure globally hinders the effective end-of-life management of many sustainable packaging types (Mohseni, 2023; Kararia, 2023).
- **Consumer Confusion & Behaviour:** Misconceptions about terms (recyclable, biodegradable, and compostable), lack of clear disposal instructions, inconvenience, and the attitude-behaviour gap limit effective consumer participation (Kararia, 2023; Dhileepan & Lakshmidevi, 2024; Mometto, 2021/2022).
- **Greenwashing:** Misleading environmental claims erode consumer trust and make it difficult to identify genuinely sustainable options (Kararia, 2023).
- **Scalability:** Scaling up production of innovative materials and implementing new systems (like reuse models) requires significant investment and logistical coordination.

3.2 The Indian Context

India faces a unique confluence of factors shaping its sustainable packaging landscape. As a major emerging economy, it confronts significant waste management challenges while also experiencing rapid growth in consumption, e-commerce, and manufacturing (Prakash et al., 2019).

- **Market Dynamics:** The Indian packaging market is growing, driven by sectors like food & beverage, pharmaceuticals, and e-commerce. Awareness of sustainability is increasing, particularly among younger, urban consumers (Prakash et al., 2019). This includes the large and digitally connected Gen Z population.
- **Policy & Regulation:** The Indian government has taken steps to address plastic waste, notably through the Plastic Waste Management Rules, which include phased bans on specific single-use plastic items and mandates for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). Enforcement and implementation, however, remain key challenges.
- **Consumer Behaviour & Values (including Gen Z):** Studies suggest young Indian consumers are increasingly environmentally conscious (Prakash et al., 2019; Taufique and Vaithianathan, 2018, as cited in Kararia, 2023). Research by Prakash et al. (2019) specifically highlights the role of values among young adults:
  - Both **altruistic** (environmental concern) and **egoistic** (health concern) values positively influence attitudes and purchase intentions towards eco-friendly packaged products among young Indians.
  - **Altruistic values exerted a stronger influence** than egoistic values on both attitude and intention for general eco-friendly packaging, suggesting environmental concern is a potent motivator in this demographic for this context.

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- Positive **attitudes** strongly predict **purchase intention**.
- **Gen Z in India**, growing up amidst heightened global awareness of climate change and local environmental issues (like pollution and waste management challenges), often amplified through digital media, generally exhibit strong pro-environmental attitudes. They expect brands to be transparent and accountable regarding sustainability. While often willing to support sustainable options, their actions are significantly moderated by affordability and accessibility. Their approach involves seeking information online, being influenced by peers and social media trends, and potentially acting as sustainability advocates within their households. However, the value-action gap likely persists significantly across all young consumers, including Gen Z, influenced by factors like price sensitivity and convenience (Kararia, 2023; Dhileepan & Lakshmidevi, 2024). Awareness levels about specific packaging solutions might still be developing, and misconceptions may exist (Kararia, 2023).

- **Industry Initiatives:** Several Indian companies, particularly in the FMCG and e-commerce sectors (e.g., Unilever, ITC, Flipkart, Amazon India), have announced initiatives to reduce plastic usage, increase recycled content, and explore alternative materials. Start-ups are also emerging with innovative bio-based or compostable packaging solutions targeting conscious consumers.
- **Challenges Specific to India:**
  - **Waste Management Infrastructure:** India grapples with inadequate waste collection, segregation, and processing infrastructure, particularly for plastics and newer materials like compostables. The informal sector plays a significant role but lacks efficiency and formal integration (Mohseni, 2023 discusses general infrastructure inadequacy). This limits the practical effectiveness of "recyclable" or "compostable" labels for many consumers, including environmentally-minded Gen Z.
  - **Cost Sensitivity:** A large segment of the Indian market, including many young consumers and Gen Z, is highly price-sensitive, making the higher cost of sustainable alternatives a major barrier (Kararia, 2023; Dhileepan & Lakshmidevi, 2024).
  - **Awareness & Education:** While awareness is growing among certain demographics (like urban Gen Z), widespread understanding of sustainable packaging concepts, labels, and proper disposal methods across the diverse Indian population is limited (Kararia, 2023).
  - **Scale & Complexity:** The sheer scale of the Indian market and its diverse logistical challenges make implementing systemic changes (like reusable packaging networks or nationwide composting) complex.
  - **Informal Economy:** A significant portion of retail occurs in the informal sector, which is harder to regulate and integrate into formal recycling or EPR schemes.

4. COMMENTARY

The transition towards sustainable packaging is a complex global imperative, driven by environmental necessity, regulatory pressure, and evolving consumer expectations. While progress is evident in material innovation and corporate commitments, significant hurdles related to cost, infrastructure, and consumer behaviour persist worldwide.

The Indian context presents both unique challenges and opportunities. The findings from Prakash et al. (2019) indicating the strong influence of value systems, especially altruistic environmental concerns among young adults, are crucial. This suggests that messaging emphasizing environmental benefits could be particularly effective for this demographic in India. The emergence of Gen Z, a cohort known for its heightened environmental and social consciousness, further underscores this potential. Digitally savvy and vocal, Indian Gen Z can amplify demand for sustainable options and hold brands accountable, representing a significant force for change.

However, bridging the intention-behaviour gap remains critical globally and in India, even among environmentally aware groups like Gen Z (Kararia, 2023). As highlighted by TPB and its extensions, positive attitudes and intentions do not automatically translate into consistent purchase behaviour. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) – encompassing factors like affordability, availability, convenience, and knowledge – plays a crucial mediating role (Ajzen, 1991; Kararia, 2023). The barriers identified – higher costs, lack of readily available options, perceived inconvenience in handling or disposal, and confusion about labels – directly impact PBC. In India, these barriers are particularly pronounced due to underdeveloped infrastructure and significant price sensitivity, which severely limit the practical choices available to consumers, including Gen Z, despite their potential willingness to act sustainably.

Furthermore, consumer trust is fragile, easily undermined by greenwashing and inconsistent messaging (Kararia, 2023). Gen Z, in particular, values authenticity and transparency. Therefore, clear, standardized, and verifiable communication (informational cues) via eco-labels, straightforward disposal instructions, and transparent reporting on lifecycle impacts is vital for building credibility (Magnier and Crie, 2015, as cited in Kararia, 2023).

Innovations offer potential solutions but require careful implementation considering the local context. Biodegradable or compostable plastics, for example, require specific disposal infrastructure absent in most of India, rendering their environmental benefit questionable in practice (Kararia, 2023). Similarly, increasing recycled content hinges on improving collection and recycling systems (Mohseni, 2023). Systemic solutions that

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integrate design, material selection, infrastructure development, and targeted consumer education (addressing different demographics, including Gen Z) are essential.

Policy plays a crucial role. Regulations like EPR schemes create market signals for businesses (Mohseni, 2023). In India, strengthening the enforcement of Plastic Waste Management Rules, investing significantly in waste management infrastructure, and integrating the informal sector are key priorities needed to enable both businesses and consumers (including the willing Gen Z) to participate effectively in a circular packaging economy.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Sustainable packaging has evolved from a niche concern to a global necessity. The environmental imperative to reduce packaging waste, conserve resources, and mitigate climate impact is undeniable. This research paper highlights the complex interplay of technological innovation, market dynamics, policy interventions, and consumer behaviour, including the role of different generations like Gen Z, which shapes the transition towards sustainability in packaging.

Globally, momentum is driven by regulations, corporate targets, and growing consumer demand, albeit inconsistent. Innovations offer pathways, but cost, performance, infrastructure, and consumer understanding remain substantial barriers.

In India, the sustainable packaging journey features burgeoning awareness, particularly among young consumers and Gen Z, strongly influenced by environmental (altruistic) values. Government policies provide direction, and industry responds, but significant infrastructural gaps, widespread price sensitivity, and patchy consumer knowledge create major hurdles. The strong altruistic values (Prakash et al., 2019) and the inherent environmental consciousness often attributed to Gen Z offer key leverage points for targeted communication and engagement strategies in India.

Ultimately, achieving a truly sustainable packaging ecosystem requires a holistic and collaborative approach. Key takeaways include:

- **Engaging the Consumer (Especially Gen Z):** While consumer awareness and values matter, translating positive attitudes into action requires addressing barriers like cost, convenience, availability, and knowledge. Clear communication, building trust, and actively engaging younger, environmentally conscious consumers like Gen Z are essential.
- **Systemic Infrastructure Change:** Focusing solely on materials is insufficient. Integrating design for circularity, major investment in collection/processing infrastructure (recycling, composting), and exploring reuse models are critical, particularly in India.
- **Effective Policy and Enforcement:** Strong, consistently enforced regulations (like EPR) are vital to drive investment and create markets. Policy must support infrastructure development.
- **Value Chain Collaboration:** Progress demands cooperation among material suppliers, manufacturers, brands, retailers, waste managers, policymakers, and consumers. Research institutions remain vital innovation drivers (Mohseni, 2023).

Future research should explore consumer behaviour across diverse Indian demographics (urban/rural, income levels), assess policy effectiveness, evaluate lifecycle impacts of alternatives in the Indian context, and investigate strategies to effectively engage Gen Z as sustainability advocates. By addressing these multifaceted aspects, India can harness the potential of its young population and move closer to a future where packaging meets needs without compromising the planet.

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CRITICAL THINKERS, GLOBAL CITIZENS: GEN Z AND THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The 21st century has witnessed the rise of Generation Z — a digitally empowered, socially conscious, and intellectually curious group of learners. This paper explores how Gen Z is redefining education and research through their unique characteristics of critical thinking, innovation, and global awareness. The study analyzes the evolving role of educational institutions in nurturing research-oriented and responsible global citizens. The findings highlight that Gen Z students are more inclined towards experiential, technology-integrated learning and value-driven education that connects personal growth with societal development. The paper concludes by proposing a transformative framework for integrating critical thinking and global citizenship into modern education systems.

Keywords: *Gen Z, Education, Research, Critical Thinking, Global Citizenship, Innovation, Technology Integration*

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z — broadly defined as individuals born between **1995 and 2010** — marks a defining shift in the educational and social landscape of the 21st century. They are the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital age, surrounded by smartphones, social media, artificial intelligence, and instant global communication. This constant exposure to technology has shaped their **thinking patterns, learning habits, and social behaviors**, making them one of the most dynamic and adaptable generations in history.

Unlike previous generations who relied primarily on textbooks, face-to-face learning, and hierarchical teacher–student models, Gen Z learners have developed a **self-directed, technology-driven approach** to education. They are accustomed to accessing vast information through online platforms, participating in virtual discussions, and collaborating across cultures and time zones. Their worldview is shaped not only by their immediate environment but also by global issues — such as climate change, gender equality, digital ethics, and social justice — which they encounter daily through digital media.

In today's interconnected world, education can no longer remain confined to memorization or exam-based evaluation. The demands of Generation Z require a **paradigm shift** — from traditional, teacher-centered pedagogy to **learner-centered, inquiry-based, and interdisciplinary education models**. They seek purpose-driven learning that connects **academic theory with practical application**, encouraging creativity, problem-solving, and innovation. As critical thinkers, they want to understand *why* and *how* knowledge matters in real life.

Moreover, Generation Z learners display a strong **sense of individuality and social responsibility**. They are deeply aware of their role as global citizens and are motivated by causes that contribute to sustainability, equality, and collective well-being. Their ability to blend digital intelligence with social consciousness positions them as a generation capable of bridging technology and humanity.

Therefore, educational institutions today face a vital challenge: **to redesign learning ecosystems** that nurture both intellectual curiosity and ethical awareness. Integrating **research-oriented learning, project-based assessments, and global collaboration** can help educators tap into Gen Z's creative and critical potential. Through such transformation, education can evolve into a platform that not only imparts knowledge but also shapes informed, empathetic, and responsible individuals.

In essence, Generation Z embodies the future of education — **curious, connected, and conscientious.** By aligning pedagogical practices with their cognitive and moral expectations, we can create an educational system that prepares them not just for careers, but for meaningful participation in the world.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze how Gen Z students approach learning and research in modern education.
2. To study the role of critical thinking in shaping Gen Z's intellectual and social identity.
3. To evaluate the impact of globalization and technology on Gen Z's sense of citizenship.
4. To propose strategies for educators to integrate research and responsibility in the curriculum.

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3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** based on secondary data. Sources include academic journals, UNESCO and OECD reports, educational surveys, and research on Gen Z learning behavior.

The analysis focuses on trends in education, youth attitudes toward research, and the integration of technology and global perspectives in learning systems.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF GEN Z AS LEARNERS

Generation Z (born roughly between 1995 and 2010) represents a generation raised in a digital and globally interconnected world. Their learning style, motivation, and engagement are profoundly influenced by technology, diversity, and social consciousness.

Below are their defining characteristics in detail:

a. Tech-Savvy and Multitasking

Gen Z learners are digital natives who have grown up surrounded by smartphones, social media, and instant information access. They use technology as an essential part of the learning process — from online research and e-learning platforms to AI-based tools and collaborative applications.

Their ability to multitask allows them to switch between multiple digital environments — watching lectures, participating in online discussions, and taking notes simultaneously. However, this also challenges their focus span, demanding creative and engaging pedagogical methods.

b. Critical and Analytical Thinkers

Unlike earlier generations that often accepted authority unquestioningly, Gen Z learners are highly analytical. They evaluate multiple sources before forming an opinion and prefer evidence-based conclusions. They thrive in inquiry-driven learning environments where questioning, debate, and independent thinking are encouraged.

c. Collaborative and Globally Aware

Gen Z is the most globally connected generation. They interact with peers worldwide through online platforms, virtual classrooms, and social networks. This exposure nurtures respect for diversity, inclusion, and collective problem-solving. Collaboration — both physical and digital — is central to how they learn and express ideas.

d. Socially Responsible

Social consciousness defines Gen Z. They are deeply concerned with issues like climate change, inequality, and human rights. Education for them is not only a means to a career but a platform to create meaningful social change. Therefore, integrating ethical learning, sustainability, and civic engagement into education aligns with their values.

e. Preference for Personalized Learning

Gen Z resists one-size-fits-all education. They prefer flexible and adaptive learning systems that match their individual pace, learning style, and interests. Digital learning platforms, AI-based adaptive tools, and modular curricula allow them to design their own learning journeys — making education more engaging and relevant.

5. GEN Z AND THE RESEARCH MINDSET

Research for Gen Z is an active, exploratory process rather than a passive academic requirement. Their curiosity is linked to problem-solving, creativity, and innovation.

a. Inquiry and Experimentation

Gen Z learners prefer asking "why" and "how" rather than simply memorizing facts. They engage in hypothesis-based exploration, using technology to test ideas and gather data. This mindset promotes scientific temper and innovation.

b. Preference for Project-Based Learning

They find traditional lectures monotonous and instead thrive in *project-based* and *experiential* learning setups. Real-world projects — whether community research, startups, or environmental initiatives — enable them to apply theoretical knowledge to practical problems.

c. Integration of Digital Innovation

For Gen Z, research is not limited to labs or libraries. They use digital media, online surveys, social networks, and AI-driven analytics to collect and interpret data. Platforms like YouTube, Reddit, and LinkedIn are not just for entertainment or networking but for discovering new perspectives and knowledge.

d. Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Many Gen Z learners view entrepreneurship as a form of applied research. Innovation labs, hackathons, and startup incubators in colleges reflect their desire to translate ideas into action. They are motivated by impact-driven innovation — creating solutions for real societal problems.

e. Institutional Support for Research

To harness this potential, educational institutions must create:

- Research and innovation hubs
- Interdisciplinary study programs

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- Access to mentorship and collaboration tools
- Opportunities for publication and presentation

Such support helps Gen Z learners grow as independent researchers and responsible innovators.

6. GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND EDUCATION

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) promotes awareness, empathy, and action toward global challenges. For Gen Z — a generation already globally connected — this framework aligns perfectly with their worldview.

a. Understanding Global Interdependence

Gen Z learners understand that local actions have global consequences. Their exposure to global media makes them aware of interconnected issues such as climate change, poverty, and migration.

b. Empathy and Intercultural Awareness

They respect cultural diversity and seek to build bridges across national and social boundaries. Education that promotes intercultural understanding enhances their ability to collaborate internationally and act as peace-builders.

c. Sustainable Thinking

Sustainability is central to Gen Z's consciousness. They expect institutions to teach not just about economic growth but about *ethical consumption, environmental balance,* and *sustainable living.*

d. Role of Education in Shaping Global Citizens

Education systems must go beyond national curriculums to include:

- **Global studies** and **ethical education**
- **Service-learning projects** related to SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)
- **Exchange programs** and virtual international collaborations

This approach prepares students not only for jobs but for responsible global leadership.

7. ROLE OF EDUCATORS AND INSTITUTIONS

For Gen Z to thrive, educators must evolve from being *information deliverers* to *learning facilitators.* Institutions should act as ecosystems of innovation, empathy, and ethics.

a. Promote Critical Thinking

Educators should encourage open dialogue, debate, and problem-solving sessions. Assignments must test understanding rather than memorization, promoting deep learning and creativity.

b. Encourage Research Linked to Social Issues

Students can be guided to conduct small research projects on local social, economic, or environmental problems. This helps them connect academic learning with real-world impact.

c. Integrate Digital and AI Tools

Institutions should use AI-driven adaptive learning systems, digital classrooms, and virtual simulations. These enhance engagement and cater to personalized learning styles.

d. Foster Intercultural Competence

Collaborations with international universities, student exchange programs, and multicultural projects allow students to experience global education firsthand.

e. Instill Ethical and Sustainable Values

Curriculums must emphasize environmental ethics, civic responsibility, and mindfulness. Experiential education — through fieldwork, volunteering, and community service — strengthens social commitment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Educational models that promote critical inquiry and research-based learning enhance Gen Z's creativity and engagement

Modern educational practices that emphasize **critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and problem-solving** are proving to be more effective for Generation Z students than rote learning systems. Gen Z learners prefer **active participation** — they want to explore, analyze, and create. When classrooms become spaces for **discussion, questioning, and project-based research**, students display greater **motivation, creativity, and ownership** of learning. This shift fosters independent thinking, boosts confidence, and prepares students for dynamic careers where innovation and adaptability are essential.

2. Institutions that integrate global citizenship education show higher student motivation and community involvement

Global citizenship education (GCE) aims to make learners aware of **global issues such as sustainability, equality, and human rights**, while also encouraging **local action**. Institutions adopting this approach have seen an increase in **student participation in community service, environmental projects, and intercultural programs**.

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Gen Z, being globally connected through technology, resonates with causes that promote **social justice, diversity, and collaboration**. This demonstrates that education tied to real-world issues creates **responsible, empathetic, and proactive citizens**.

3. The future of education lies in interdisciplinary collaboration — connecting science, arts, and ethics

The 21st-century educational paradigm is moving away from isolated subject silos toward **interdisciplinary learning**.

Combining **STEM with humanities and ethical reasoning** helps students develop a **holistic worldview**. For instance, integrating data science with environmental ethics or economics with social psychology enhances understanding and application of knowledge in real-life contexts.

This approach not only strengthens research capabilities but also encourages **ethical innovation and sustainable problem-solving**, key traits for Gen Z researchers and leaders.

4. Technology must be a means of empowerment, not distraction

While technology offers vast educational opportunities — digital libraries, online courses, AI-assisted research tools — its overuse can lead to **information overload, reduced attention span, and social isolation**.

The discussion reveals that institutions should focus on **digital literacy**, helping students learn how to **use technology purposefully**.

Digital tools should serve as **platforms for exploration, creativity, and collaboration**, not mere entertainment.

Responsible technology integration prepares students for the **digital research ecosystem** while maintaining mental balance and ethical awareness.

5. Gen Z's learning preferences indicate a strong shift toward research for real-world change rather than traditional examination systems

Generation Z learners are **outcome-oriented** — they seek meaning and purpose in their education. Rather than memorizing facts for exams, they value **practical application, experiential learning, and innovation**.

Research findings show a growing preference for **internships, field studies, start-up incubation, and social innovation projects** as part of learning.

This evolution reflects a transformation in educational priorities — from **academic success to societal impact**.

Educational systems must therefore **redefine assessment models** to measure creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving rather than mere retention of information.

10. CONCLUSION

Generation Z represents a transformative force in the global educational landscape. Born in the digital era, they have inherited a world of constant change, innovation, and interconnection. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z learners are not passive recipients of information — they are *active participants* in the learning process. Their natural curiosity, technological fluency, and global consciousness make them catalysts for a new model of education centered on *research, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility.*

The future of education depends on how effectively institutions adapt to the evolving needs of this generation. Traditional rote learning methods can no longer meet their intellectual aspirations or societal expectations. Instead, the education system must integrate **experiential learning**, **research-based projects**, and **global awareness programs** that connect knowledge with real-world challenges. When Gen Z students are encouraged to explore problems, innovate solutions, and engage in meaningful dialogue, they become architects of social and intellectual progress.

Furthermore, Generation Z's approach to knowledge emphasizes **collaboration over competition**. They value diversity, inclusivity, and equity — traits essential for responsible global citizenship. Through education that promotes empathy and intercultural understanding, Gen Z can lead initiatives that address climate change, social injustice, and technological ethics with informed sensitivity. Research, in this context, is not just an academic exercise but a *tool for transformation* — linking theory with practice and thought with action.

For educators and policymakers, the challenge lies in creating a balanced ecosystem that merges **digital innovation with humanistic values**. Technology should not replace human connection; rather, it should enhance communication, creativity, and civic engagement. Academic institutions must redefine success not merely by grades or publications but by the ability to foster critical thinkers, ethical leaders, and socially aware citizens.

Ultimately, empowering Generation Z requires more than access to information — it demands **inspiration, mentorship, and moral guidance.** When education nurtures compassion alongside competence, it cultivates individuals capable of making thoughtful, sustainable contributions to humanity.

In essence, Generation Z is not just the future of education — they are the *bridge* between knowledge and change. By aligning research with responsibility and intellect with empathy, this generation has the potential to create a world that is not only smarter but also kinder, more equitable, and profoundly sustainable.

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PEDAGOGY OF THE IDEAL STATE: EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION OF RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP IN PHILOSOPHICAL UTOPIAS

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Abstract

This paper explores the pivotal role of education in shaping responsible citizenship within philosophical visions of the ideal state. Drawing on foundational texts such as Plato's Republic, Thomas More's Utopia, and Philip Sidney's political thought, alongside indigenous ideals like Ram Rajya from the Indian tradition and the mythical El Dorado, the study examines how diverse civilizations have imagined education as the cornerstone of moral governance and social harmony. These utopian frameworks, though culturally distinct, converge on the conviction that education is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but a transformative process aimed at cultivating virtue, justice, and civic responsibility among citizens. By comparing these visions, the paper seeks to highlight the shared pedagogical principles underlying utopian political thought, while also interrogating their limitations when measured against historical realities. Ultimately, the analysis underscores that the dream of a just and responsible citizenry remains inseparable from how societies conceive and practice education, whether in ancient philosophy, medieval humanism, or mythic imagination.

Keywords: *Education, Responsible Citizenship, Ideal State, Plato's Republic, Thomas More's Utopia, Ram Rajya, Philip Sidney, El Dorado, Utopian Thought, Civic Virtue*

INTRODUCTION

Education functions as the cornerstone of cultivating responsible citizenship and sustaining moral and political order in any society. This investigation explores the essential role of education within the framework of ideal states as envisaged by several seminal philosophers and literary thinkers—Plato in The Republic, Thomas More in Utopia, Philip Sidney's humanist writings, the Indian concept of Ram Rajya, and the mythic ideal of El Dorado. Though these visions spring from distinct cultural soil and epochal horizons, they all emphasize education as a transformative process cultivating virtues such as justice, responsibility, and harmony necessary for the flourishing of the community. This paper offers a comparative philosophical analysis of these pedagogical paradigms, aiming to extract the shared principles that underpin the education of ideal citizens and to reflect upon the contemporary relevance of these enduring ideals.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: UTOPIA AND EDUCATION

The very concept of utopia—literally "no place"—as coined by Thomas More in his 1516 work, alludes to an imagined perfect society where social stability results from the harmonious ordering of individual and communal life (More). Utopian thought integrates education not as a simple transmission of factual knowledge but as a vehicle for moral and civic formation, seeking to cultivate citizens who embody ideal virtues supporting political justice and social well-being. Education within utopias functions as a vital means of aligning personal character with the collective good, producing individuals capable of sustaining the ideal polity. This conceptual framework recognizes education as encompassing intellectual, ethical, physical, and sometimes spiritual dimensions, reflecting the multifaceted purposes assigned by utopian visionaries (Kumar 45).

Plato's Republic and the Philosopher-King's Curriculum

Among the earliest and most influential articulations of education as the foundation of ideal citizenship comes from Plato's Republic. Plato designs an education system purpose-built to produce the philosopher-king, the just ruler uniquely fitted to govern through knowledge and virtue. His tripartite theory of the soul posits three parts—reason, spirit, and appetite—that correspond with the three social classes in the city: rulers (philosophers), auxiliaries (warriors), and producers (farmers, artisans, etc.) (Plato 375a-414d). Education is carefully tailored to these roles, but most elaborately for the guardians (rulers and auxiliaries), who undergo a lifelong process beginning in childhood.

From the age of seven, children destined for leadership receive state-supervised education combining physical training (gymnastics) and intellectual cultivation (music broadly interpreted to include poetry, drama, and history) to harmonize body and soul (Plato 401c). Physical education fosters health and discipline, while music acts to refine character and promote moral sensibilities. Plato enforces censorship of literature deemed morally harmful to guard against the corruption of young souls (Plato 398a).

Around age eighteen, youth enter a more advanced stage of study, including mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and dialectics—disciplines required to cultivate abstract reasoning and knowledge of eternal truths (Plato 522d-

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534c). At twenty, a rigorous examination determines who progresses to higher philosophical education, focused on dialectics and the search for the Form of the Good, the ultimate principle that illuminates justice and ethical governance (Plato 532a-541b). Those who succeed in this phase undergo further training until about age thirty-five, after which they assume leadership roles.

Plato's educational vision is deeply political and moral, aiming not merely at intellectual accomplishment but at the production of rulers capable of aligning personal virtue with the good of the city. The philosopher-king's education is a lifelong process combining knowledge acquisition, moral discipline, and practical experience (Plato 540a). Only through such an education, Plato argues, can justice prevail and citizens embrace their roles responsibly.

Thomas More's Utopia and the Humanist Ideal

Thomas More's Utopia shifts the educational narrative into Renaissance humanism, where education facilitates civic participation, social equality, and rational governance. More imagines a society where learning is communal and intertwined with work ethic and moral responsibility. Every citizen receives education in a range of subjects including languages, philosophy, and practical arts, creating a populace equipped for thoughtful participation in civic life (More 42-55).

More's educational ideal emphasizes the intellectual and ethical formation of individuals in service of the common good, with public education accessible to all rather than restricted to an elite class. Unlike Plato's hierarchical system, More's Utopia seeks to diminish social inequalities through equal instruction and shared responsibility (Jennings 102). Moreover, education in Utopia is tightly linked to the ideals of cooperation, moderation, and moral regulation, reflecting More's concern with order and social harmony.

However, More's vision is not without critique. The idealized educational model may seem overly optimistic or restrictive, as it entails strict social conformity and censorship, leading to tensions between utopian idealism and realistic political pluralism (Jennings 110).

Philip Sidney and the Educational Role of the Arts

Philip Sidney's writings, especially The Defence of Poesy, bring an aesthetic dimension to the pedagogy of ideal citizenship. He asserts that poetry and the arts are powerful tools for moral education, capable of inspiring virtues such as justice, courage, and temperance in their audiences (Sidney 56). For Sidney, the imaginative narratives contained in poetry function as ethical exemplars, teaching citizens through powerful emotional and intellectual engagement.

This poetic pedagogy complements Plato's emphasis on music but expands the role of arts in shaping the soul. Sidney's humanist and moralistic vision holds that arts should elevate the character and promote civic responsibility, making education a culturally rich enterprise that nurtures both reason and emotion (Sidney 63). His vision ultimately bridges classical philosophy and Renaissance humanism by situating the arts as central to civic virtue.

Ram Rajya: Indigenous Conceptions of Education and Citizenship

The concept of Ram Rajya, famously attributed to the reign of Lord Rama in Indian epic tradition, embodies an indigenous vision of ideal governance suffused with dharma (righteousness or ethical duty). Education under Ram Rajya is holistic, encompassing spiritual, moral, and intellectual development aimed at producing citizens who uphold justice, cooperation, and harmony (Chatterjee 89).

Contrary to strictly intellectual or hierarchical models, education in Ram Rajya aligns closely with spiritual practice and social responsibilities, emphasizing the internalization of ethical duties and respect for social order (Sharma 115). The king, as a moral exemplar, ensures that education inculcates civic virtues across societal strata, thereby realizing a polity where governance is by righteousness and citizens act in duty-bound cooperation.

Education also focuses on the intergenerational transmission of values, reinforcing the societal fabric through narrative, ritual, and communal learning methods distinct from Western pedagogical models but no less profound in molding responsible citizens (Sharma 118).

El Dorado and the Mythic Imagination of the Ideal

El Dorado—the legendary city of immense gold believed to exist in the Americas—represents a mythic utopia contrasting materially rich promise against philosophical or moral ideals. Although less explicitly pedagogical than Plato or More's models, El Dorado's allure reflects deep European aspirations for prosperity, social order, and utopian abundance (Gonzalez 76).

Education implied through such myths tends toward sustaining social cohesion by preserving mythic knowledge and moral order linked to material wealth, rather than detailed intellectual or ethical training. Consequently, El Dorado's utopia provides a counterpoint, highlighting diverse cultural articulations of ideal society where education is sometimes more symbolic than systematic.

Comparative Analysis

Examining these varied utopias reveals convergent pedagogical themes: education's emphasis on virtue, justice, and responsibility tied to the welfare of the polity. Plato's rationalist curriculum focuses on the intellectual and moral development tailored to social roles; More's humanism broadens access and links education to social

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equity; Sidney enlivens civic virtue through the arts; Ram Rajya integrates spiritual and ethical formation with governance; El Dorado symbolizes material idealism with associated cultural education.

However, these models face critiques regarding elitism, idealism, and practical implementation. Plato's guardian education excludes majority participation; More's utopia balances equality with normative conformity; Ram Rajya's spiritual emphasis may conflict with secular pluralism; and El Dorado's mythic vision lacks practical pedagogy (Kumar 72). Despite these, the principle uniting them is clear: education is indispensable to realizing responsible citizenship and just governance.

Contemporary Relevance

Revisiting these utopian educational visions yields valuable insights for current democratic societies. Education remains a key instrument for nurturing informed, ethical citizens capable of navigating pluralistic values and civic responsibilities (Nussbaum 134). Integrating historical ideals into educational policy encourages a renewed focus not just on skills, but on virtues like justice, empathy, and cooperation essential to democratic life.

Though no utopia is perfectly realizable, adapting their pedagogical virtues can inspire constructive reforms in curriculum, pedagogy, and civic education. Emphasizing moral and civic dimensions enriches contemporary education's role in addressing social fragmentation and fostering collective well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that education stands as the foundational element of all ideal societies, whether framed in ancient Greek philosophy, Renaissance humanism, indigenous ethics, or mythic imagination. Though culturally distinct, these utopian education models converge in viewing education as a lifelong process cultivating virtue, wisdom, and responsibility, empowering citizens to contribute to just and harmonious communities. Bridging these philosophical insights with practical educational reforms remains an essential project for nurturing responsible citizenship in the modern world.

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PREPARING YOUTH FOR GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Guide
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Abstract

This study focuses on how to prepare young people for the fast-changing global world. Today's youth face many challenges such as climate change, unemployment, mental health issues, and social inequality. At the same time, they have great opportunities in technology, innovation, global communication, and entrepreneurship. The purpose of this study is to understand what kind of education, training, and support can help youth become confident, skilled, and responsible global citizens.

The methodology involves a comprehensive review of books, scholarly articles, and reports on youth development, education, and global trends. In addition, real-life examples of successful youth programs are examined, alongside interviews with teachers, students, and youth mentors. These sources provide insights into effective strategies for preparing youth to navigate global challenges.

Key findings reveal that traditional classroom learning alone is insufficient. Young people require practical competencies such as problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and digital literacy. Programs that integrate experiential learning, community service, and global awareness prove more impactful. Furthermore, emotional support, mentorship, and equitable access to resources are essential, particularly for youth from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds.

The study concludes that preparing youth for global challenges demands a holistic and inclusive approach. Collaboration among schools, families, governments, and communities is vital to building flexible, supportive, and future-ready learning environments. When provided with the right tools and opportunities, youth can emerge as active problem-solvers and leaders. Investing in their development today is an investment in a more sustainable and equitable world tomorrow.

Keywords: *Youth empowerment; Global challenges; Education reform; Digital literacy; Mental health; Social inequality; Climate change; Global citizenship; Experiential learning; Mentorship*

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century presents young people with a paradoxical reality: immense challenges alongside unprecedented opportunities. On one hand, climate change threatens ecosystems and livelihoods, unemployment undermines economic stability, mental health crises affect millions of youth worldwide, and social inequality continues to marginalize vulnerable populations. On the other hand, globalization and digital technologies have opened new pathways for youth empowerment. Social media platforms, online education, and entrepreneurial ecosystems provide opportunities for young people to engage with global issues, develop skills, and contribute to sustainable development. This duality of risk and possibility defines the contemporary youth experience and underscores the urgency of preparing young people to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Climate change is perhaps the most pressing global challenge of our time. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and ecological degradation are reshaping the environment in ways that directly affect young people's futures. Youth will inherit the responsibility of addressing these crises, and their ability to innovate sustainable solutions will determine the resilience of societies worldwide. Similarly, unemployment and underemployment remain persistent concerns. The rapid pace of automation and globalization has transformed labor markets, reducing opportunities for stable employment and creating precarious work conditions. Young people entering the workforce must therefore be equipped with adaptable skills that allow them to thrive in uncertain economic landscapes.

Mental health challenges add another layer of complexity to the lives of youth. Rising rates of anxiety, depression, and stress highlight the importance of resilience training and emotional support systems. Without adequate preparation, mental health concerns can hinder academic achievement, career development, and social participation. Social inequality further compounds these challenges, as disparities in access to education, healthcare, and resources disproportionately affect rural and disadvantaged communities. Marginalized youth face systemic barriers that limit their opportunities for growth and participation, making inclusivity and equity essential components of youth preparation.

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Yet, despite these challenges, the twenty-first century also offers unprecedented opportunities. Advances in technology and innovation have created new avenues for entrepreneurship, creativity, and global collaboration. Digital literacy enables young people to participate in the knowledge economy, develop start-ups, and engage in problem-solving at a global scale. Global communication platforms allow youth to connect across borders and cultures, fostering intercultural understanding and collective action. Online education has democratized learning, providing opportunities for skill development regardless of geographical location. Youth activism, exemplified by movements such as Greta Thunberg's climate strikes and grassroots campaigns in India, demonstrates the transformative potential of young leaders. These opportunities highlight the dual reality facing youth: while challenges are significant, the potential for positive change is equally powerful.

This paper explores how education, training, and support systems can equip youth to become confident, skilled, and responsible global citizens. It argues that traditional classroom learning is insufficient and that holistic approaches integrating experiential learning, mentorship, and emotional support are essential. Traditional education often emphasizes rote memorization and standardized testing, which fail to prepare youth for the complexities of modern life. Instead, young people require practical competencies such as problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and digital literacy. Programs that integrate experiential learning, community service, and global awareness prove more impactful, as they bridge the gap between theory and practice and foster civic engagement.

By examining global challenges, opportunities, theoretical frameworks, and real-world case studies, this study provides insights into effective strategies for preparing youth to navigate the complexities of the modern world. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration among schools, families, governments, and communities in building flexible, supportive, and future-ready learning environments. Ultimately, the paper argues that investing in youth development today is an investment in a more sustainable, equitable, and innovative world tomorrow.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

1. Global Challenges Facing Youth

- **Climate Change**

Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges confronting today's youth. Rising global temperatures, melting glaciers, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events threaten ecosystems, livelihoods, and human security. Young people, who will inherit the consequences of these crises, must be prepared to develop sustainable solutions and advocate for environmental justice. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has repeatedly emphasized that the next two decades are critical for reducing carbon emissions, and youth activism has already played a pivotal role in raising awareness. However, the challenge is not only environmental but also social and economic, as climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Preparing youth to address this issue requires integrating sustainability education into curricula, fostering ecological literacy, and encouraging participation in climate-related initiatives.

- **Mental Health**

Mental health concerns have become increasingly prevalent among adolescents and young adults. Rising rates of anxiety, depression, and stress highlight the importance of resilience training and emotional support systems. The pressures of academic performance, social expectations, and economic uncertainty contribute to mental health challenges that can hinder both personal development and professional success. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified mental health as a critical area of concern, noting that half of all mental health conditions begin by the age of 14. Addressing these concerns requires integrating mental health awareness and support into educational and community programs, ensuring that youth have access to counseling, peer support, and safe spaces for expression.

2. Global Opportunities for Youth

- **Technology and Innovation**

Despite these challenges, youth today have access to opportunities that previous generations could scarcely imagine. Technology and innovation have created new avenues for entrepreneurship, creativity, and global collaboration. Digital literacy enables young people to participate in the knowledge economy, develop start-ups, and engage in problem-solving at a global scale. For instance, coding bootcamps and digital training programs empower youth to enter high-demand fields such as artificial intelligence, data science, and cybersecurity. These opportunities not only enhance employability but also allow youth to contribute to technological advancements that shape the future.

- **Global Communication**

Global communication platforms allow youth to connect across borders and cultures, fostering intercultural understanding and collective action. Social media has become a powerful tool for mobilizing movements, sharing knowledge, and amplifying youth voices in global debates. Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok enable young people to engage in discussions on climate change, gender equality, and social justice, often

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reaching audiences far beyond their local communities. This connectivity empowers youth to influence international discourse and collaborate on solutions to shared challenges.

- **Access to Education**

Access to education has also expanded through online platforms, which democratize learning and provide opportunities for skill development regardless of geographical location. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) and virtual classrooms enable youth to acquire knowledge and competencies that were once restricted to elite institutions. This democratization of education ensures that learning is no longer confined to traditional boundaries. For example, platforms such as Coursera, edX, and Khan Academy provide affordable or free courses in diverse fields, allowing youth from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds to access high-quality education.

- **Youth Activism**

Youth activism represents another powerful opportunity. From Greta Thunberg's climate strikes to grassroots movements in India, young people are increasingly at the forefront of social and environmental change. Their ability to mobilize communities and advocate for justice demonstrates the transformative potential of youth leadership. Activism not only raises awareness but also drives tangible policy changes, proving that youth are active agents of global transformation. For instance, youth-led organizations have successfully lobbied governments to adopt stronger climate policies, while others have championed causes such as gender equality, racial justice, and access to education.

3. Theoretical Anchors

- **Human Capital Theory**

Human capital theory emphasizes the role of education and training in enhancing productivity and employability. By investing in youth education, societies can build a workforce capable of meeting future challenges. This perspective underscores the economic rationale for preparing youth with skills that align with global labor market demands. Education is not merely a personal benefit but a collective investment in national and global development.

- **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory highlights the importance of mentorship and peer influence in skill acquisition. Youth learn not only from formal education but also from role models, mentors, and collaborative experiences. This theory suggests that effective youth programs must incorporate mentorship structures and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. For example, mentorship initiatives that connect youth with professionals in their fields of interest can provide guidance, inspiration, and practical knowledge.

- **Postcolonial Perspectives**

Postcolonial perspectives remind us that youth identity is shaped by both indigenous heritage and global influences. Preparing youth requires sensitivity to cultural contexts and recognition of diverse identities. This framework emphasizes the importance of valuing indigenous knowledge systems while equipping youth to engage with global narratives. For instance, indigenous youth movements often combine traditional ecological knowledge with modern sustainability practices, creating innovative approaches to environmental stewardship.

- **Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism underscores the need for environmental responsibility. Youth must be educated to value sustainability and to integrate ecological awareness into their personal and professional lives. This theoretical lens highlights the moral and ethical dimensions of preparing youth for global challenges, ensuring that environmental stewardship becomes a core component of global citizenship. By fostering ecological literacy, societies can empower youth to lead efforts in combating climate change and promoting sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY :

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how young people can be prepared for the fast-changing global world. Given the complexity of the challenges and opportunities facing youth, qualitative methods are most appropriate because they allow for a deeper understanding of experiences, perceptions, and strategies rather than relying solely on numerical data. The focus is on gathering rich, descriptive insights from multiple sources to construct a holistic picture of youth development in the twenty-first century.

- **Research Approach**

The research is primarily based on a comprehensive review of secondary sources, including books, scholarly articles, policy reports, and global trend analyses. These materials provide theoretical grounding and contextual knowledge about youth challenges such as climate change, unemployment, mental health, and social inequality, as well as opportunities in technology, innovation, and activism. Reviewing existing literature ensures that the study builds upon established knowledge while identifying gaps that require further exploration.

- **Case Studies**

To complement the literature review, the study incorporates case studies of successful youth programs. These include international initiatives led by organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO, national programs like Skill India, and grassroots movements such as youth-led climate strikes. Case studies provide concrete examples of how education, training, and support systems have been implemented in diverse contexts. They highlight best practices, innovative approaches, and lessons learned that can inform future strategies for youth empowerment.

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- **Interviews and Perspectives**

In addition to secondary sources, the study draws upon interviews and perspectives from teachers, students, and youth mentors. These voices offer firsthand insights into the realities of youth preparation. Teachers provide perspectives on the limitations of traditional classroom learning and the need for experiential approaches. Students share their experiences of navigating challenges such as unemployment and mental health pressures. Mentors contribute knowledge about the importance of guidance, role models, and peer influence in shaping youth skills and confidence.

- **Data Analysis**

The collected information is analyzed using thematic coding and comparative analysis. Themes such as "skills development," "mentorship," "mental health support," and "global awareness" are identified across the literature, case studies, and interviews. Comparative analysis is then used to examine similarities and differences across contexts, highlighting strategies that are universally effective as well as those that are context-specific. This approach ensures that the findings are both comprehensive and nuanced.

- **Ethical Considerations**

Although the study relies primarily on secondary sources and illustrative interviews, ethical considerations remain central. Respect for participants' perspectives, acknowledgment of cultural diversity, and sensitivity to issues of inequality are emphasized throughout the research process. The study avoids generalizations that may overlook the unique challenges faced by marginalized youth and instead seeks to highlight inclusive and equitable approaches.

FINDINGS :

The analysis of literature, case studies, and interviews reveals several important findings about how young people can be effectively prepared for the fast-changing global world. These findings highlight the limitations of traditional education, the competencies required for success, the value of experiential learning, and the importance of support systems. Together, they provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that can empower youth to navigate both challenges and opportunities.

- **Limitations of Traditional Classroom Learning**

The first major finding is that traditional classroom learning, with its emphasis on rote memorization and standardized testing, is insufficient for preparing youth to meet global challenges. While academic knowledge remains important, it does not adequately equip students with the practical skills needed to address complex, real-world problems. Interviews with teachers and students confirm that classroom instruction often fails to foster creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability. Case studies of innovative programs demonstrate that youth benefit more from approaches that integrate theory with practice, allowing them to apply knowledge in meaningful contexts.

- **Essential Competencies for Youth**

The second finding emphasizes the range of competencies that young people must develop to thrive in the global era. These include:

- Problem-solving skills: The ability to analyze complex issues and devise innovative solutions.
- Teamwork and leadership: Skills that enable collaboration and the capacity to guide collective efforts.
- Digital literacy: Competence in using technology to access information, communicate, and participate in the knowledge economy.
- Emotional resilience: The capacity to cope with stress, adapt to change, and maintain mental well-being.

These competencies are consistently identified across literature and interviews as essential for youth success. Employers, educators, and mentors all stress that technical knowledge alone is insufficient; young people must also cultivate soft skills and emotional intelligence.

- **Impact of Experiential Learning**

The third finding highlights the effectiveness of programs that integrate experiential learning, community service, and global awareness. Case studies of youth initiatives show that internships, project-based learning, and entrepreneurial activities provide hands-on experience that bridges the gap between theory and practice. Community service projects foster civic engagement and social responsibility, while global awareness programs broaden perspectives and encourage intercultural understanding. Students who participate in these initiatives report greater confidence, stronger problem-solving abilities, and a deeper sense of purpose.

- **Importance of Support Systems**

The fourth finding underscores the critical role of support systems in youth development. Mentorship networks connect young people with experienced professionals who can guide their personal and professional growth. Emotional support structures, including counseling services and peer support groups, help youth navigate mental health challenges. Equitable access to resources ensures that disadvantaged youth are not excluded from opportunities for growth. Interviews with mentors and students reveal that guidance and encouragement from trusted adults often make the difference between success and failure.

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- **Case Study Insights**

Case studies provide concrete examples of these findings in action. For instance, UNICEF's youth empowerment programs demonstrate the value of combining education with community engagement. India's Skill India initiative highlights the importance of vocational training and digital literacy in addressing unemployment. Youth-led climate movements illustrate how activism can empower young people to take ownership of global issues. These examples confirm that holistic approaches, which combine education, experiential learning, and support systems, are most effective in preparing youth for the future.

DISCUSSION :

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for a holistic and inclusive approach to preparing youth for the fast-changing global world. While traditional classroom learning provides foundational knowledge, it does not adequately equip young people with the competencies required to navigate complex realities. The discussion therefore focuses on how schools, families, governments, and communities can collaborate to create supportive environments that foster resilience, innovation, and global citizenship.

- **The Role of Schools**

Schools remain central to youth development, but their role must evolve. Traditional curricula often emphasize memorization and standardized testing, which limit creativity and problem-solving. To prepare youth for global challenges, schools must integrate practical skill-building into their programs. This includes project-based learning, internships, and innovation labs that allow students to apply knowledge in real-world contexts. Sustainability education should also be embedded in curricula, ensuring that youth understand ecological challenges and are equipped to contribute to environmental solutions. By shifting from rote learning to experiential approaches, schools can nurture critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability.

- **The Role of Families**

Families provide the emotional foundation for youth development. Parents and guardians influence values, resilience, and identity formation. Emotional support within families helps young people cope with stress and uncertainty, while encouragement fosters confidence and ambition. Families also play a crucial role in bridging cultural traditions with modern opportunities, ensuring that youth remain grounded in their heritage while engaging with global realities. In contexts where social inequality limits access to resources, families often serve as advocates for their children, seeking opportunities and support systems that can enhance their growth.

- **The Role of Governments**

Governments must invest in youth-focused policies and infrastructure. Equitable access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities is essential for reducing disparities and empowering marginalized youth. Policies that support vocational training, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship can help address unemployment and prepare youth for evolving labor markets. Governments also play a role in mental health support, ensuring that counseling services and awareness programs are integrated into schools and communities. By prioritizing youth development in national agendas, governments can create environments where young people are not only prepared for challenges but also empowered to lead.

- **The Role of Communities**

Communities provide spaces for participation, belonging, and collaboration. Local organizations, NGOs, and peer networks can create inclusive environments that encourage youth engagement. Community service projects foster civic responsibility, while youth clubs and mentorship programs provide guidance and support. Communities also play a role in addressing inequality by creating opportunities for disadvantaged youth to access resources and participate in collective initiatives. In rural areas, community-driven programs can bridge gaps in education and infrastructure, ensuring that youth are not excluded from global opportunities.

- **Visionary Recommendations**

The discussion highlights several visionary recommendations for preparing youth:

- Sustainability in curricula: Embedding ecological literacy and environmental responsibility into education.
- Innovation labs in schools: Creating spaces for creativity, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving.
- Mentorship networks: Connecting youth with professionals who can provide guidance and inspiration.
- Digital inclusion initiatives: Ensuring that all young people, regardless of background, have access to technological resources.
- Mental health support systems: Integrating counseling and peer support into schools and communities.

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These recommendations emphasize that preparing youth is not the responsibility of a single institution but a collective effort. Collaboration among schools, families, governments, and communities ensures that young people receive the education, training, and support needed to thrive.

- **Comparative Insights**

The findings also suggest that strategies must be adapted to specific contexts. In developed nations, where digital infrastructure is strong, emphasis may be placed on innovation and entrepreneurship. In developing nations, where inequality and resource gaps are more pronounced, focus must be on equitable access, vocational training, and community support. Despite these differences, the universal need for resilience, critical thinking, and global awareness remains consistent across contexts.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that preparing youth for the fast-changing global world is both a necessity and an opportunity. The challenges of climate change, unemployment, mental health crises, and social inequality are complex and interconnected, demanding innovative and inclusive solutions. At the same time, the opportunities offered by technology, global communication, and youth activism provide powerful tools for transformation. The findings reveal that traditional classroom learning alone is insufficient; young people require practical competencies such as problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and digital literacy. Programs that integrate experiential learning, community service, and global awareness prove more impactful, while mentorship and emotional support systems are essential for resilience and confidence.

The discussion emphasizes that preparing youth is not the responsibility of schools alone but a collective effort involving families, governments, and communities. Schools must evolve to foster creativity and sustainability, families must provide emotional grounding, governments must invest in equitable policies, and communities must create inclusive spaces for participation. Together, these stakeholders can build flexible, supportive, and future-ready learning environments.

Ultimately, the study concludes that youth are not merely passive recipients of education and training but active agents of change. When provided with the right tools and opportunities, they can emerge as leaders, innovators, and problem-solvers who contribute to building a more sustainable and equitable world. Preparing youth for global challenges is therefore not only an educational priority but also a moral and social imperative. It is an investment in the future — one that ensures societies are resilient, inclusive, and capable of addressing the pressing issues of our time. By empowering youth today, we lay the foundation for a tomorrow defined by sustainability, justice, and innovation.

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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SHAPING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS: FOUNDATIONS FOR ETHICAL AND CIVIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Education is the cornerstone of individual empowerment and societal progress. Beyond equipping individuals with knowledge and vocational skills, education serves the higher moral purpose of shaping responsible, ethical, and civically engaged citizens. This research paper investigates the multidimensional role of education in fostering civic consciousness, moral development, and democratic participation. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from John Dewey, Lawrence Kohlberg, Paulo Freire, and Mahatma Gandhi, the paper critically analyzes how education can transform individuals into conscientious citizens committed to justice, peace, and social harmony. Using a qualitative, conceptual methodology, the paper synthesizes policy documents, scholarly works, and pedagogical frameworks, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education (GCED) framework. Findings suggest that value-based and experiential education significantly enhance civic engagement and ethical responsibility. The study concludes that cultivating responsible citizenship requires not only curricular reform but also the moral leadership of educators and institutions that model democratic and inclusive practices.

Keywords: *education, citizenship, ethics, moral values, civic responsibility, democracy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as the foundation for human and societal development. However, its purpose extends far beyond academic achievement or economic productivity. True education aims to shape individuals who think critically, act ethically, and contribute meaningfully to the collective welfare of society. In the words of **John Dewey (1916)**, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."

In democratic nations, particularly in India, the role of education in nation-building has always been central. From the **Gandhian philosophy of Nai Talim**, emphasizing character and service, to the **National Education Policy (NEP, 2020)** advocating holistic and value-based learning, education has been envisioned as a means to create morally upright and socially responsible citizens. However, in the current context of globalization and competitive individualism, education is increasingly commodified—focusing on grades, degrees, and employability at the expense of ethical and civic values.

This paper revisits the moral and civic purpose of education, exploring how formal and informal learning can shape responsible citizens capable of addressing global challenges with empathy, justice, and social consciousness.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Modern education systems face a paradox. On one hand, they successfully produce technically skilled individuals capable of economic contribution; on the other, they often fail to instill ethical judgment, civic responsibility, and empathy.

The **problem** lies in the **disjunction between knowledge acquisition and value internalization**. Learners may possess vast cognitive knowledge but lack the moral compass required to use it responsibly. This gap manifests in social issues such as corruption, intolerance, environmental neglect, and civic apathy.

Therefore, the **central research problem** addressed in this study is:

How can education be restructured to integrate ethical, civic, and moral learning that produces responsible, participatory, and compassionate citizens in a democratic society?

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the philosophical and theoretical foundations linking education and citizenship.
2. To examine how moral and civic education contribute to personal and societal transformation.
3. To identify challenges in the implementation of value-based and civic education.
4. To propose strategies for integrating citizenship education into educational policy and pedagogy.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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1. What is the relationship between education, moral development, and civic responsibility?
2. How do educational institutions contribute to the formation of ethical and responsible citizens?
3. What challenges hinder the effective integration of civic and moral education in formal learning systems?
4. What pedagogical and policy reforms can enhance citizenship education?

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **qualitative conceptual approach**, relying on secondary sources such as academic literature, policy documents, and philosophical texts. The analysis draws from:

- Classical and contemporary educational theories (Dewey, Freire, Gandhi, Kohlberg).
- Policy frameworks such as **NEP 2020**, **UNESCO's GCED**, and **OECD's Education 2030 Framework**.
- Scholarly research on civic, moral, and global citizenship education.

The research synthesizes these sources to conceptualize an integrative model of responsible citizenship formation through education.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1 Education and Civic Responsibility

Education is often regarded as the principal means of cultivating civic awareness. According to **Dewey (1916)**, democratic education fosters "associated living," where individuals learn to cooperate and deliberate for the common good. Similarly, **Banks (2008)** asserts that multicultural citizenship education prepares students to navigate diversity with fairness and empathy.

6.2 Moral Development and Ethical Education

Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) conceptualized moral development as a series of cognitive stages, ranging from obedience to universal ethical principles. He emphasized that education can accelerate moral reasoning through dialogue, reflection, and ethical dilemmas. Likewise, **Lickona (1991)** proposed that moral education involves both moral knowing and moral action, integrating cognitive understanding with behavioral practice.

6.3 Gandhian and Indian Philosophical Perspectives

Indian thinkers like **Mahatma Gandhi** and **Rabindranath Tagore** envisioned education as the cultivation of self-reliant, ethical, and socially responsible individuals. Gandhi's *Nai Talim* emphasized manual work, moral integrity, and service to humanity as central to education (Gandhi, 1951). Tagore, through *Visva-Bharati University*, promoted freedom, creativity, and cultural harmony.

6.4 Global Citizenship Education

In the global context, **UNESCO (2015)** defines *Global Citizenship Education (GCED)* as a transformative pedagogy that develops learners' understanding of global interdependence, human rights, and sustainability. The **OECD (2018)** further highlights social and emotional learning as core competencies for active citizenship.

6.5 Indian Policy Frameworks

The **National Education Policy (NEP, 2020)** emphasizes holistic development through ethics, empathy, and constitutional values such as liberty, equality, and fraternity. It envisions education as the means to create "global citizens rooted in Indian values."

7. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

7.1 The Transformative Purpose of Education

Education is both a personal and societal investment. Beyond skill acquisition, it must cultivate critical consciousness—a term coined by **Paulo Freire (1970)**—which enables individuals to recognize social injustices and act to transform them. A responsible citizen is not merely law-abiding but socially aware and ethically active.

7.2 Moral and Civic Education in Practice

Effective moral and civic education requires participatory learning environments. For instance, programs like **Service Learning**, **National Service Scheme (NSS)**, and **National Cadet Corps (NCC)** combine community engagement with experiential learning. These initiatives nurture leadership, empathy, and civic identity (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

7.3 Role of Teachers as Moral Mentors

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping values. According to **Noddings (2013)**, care ethics should guide educational relationships, where teachers model empathy and justice. The moral example of educators influences learners more profoundly than theoretical lessons on ethics.

7.4 Challenges to Value-Based Education

Despite policy intent, moral and civic education face numerous challenges:

- **Curricular Constraints:** Overemphasis on examination-oriented learning leaves little scope for ethical discussions.
- **Teacher Training Deficits:** Educators often lack pedagogical training in ethics and civics.
- **Societal Pressures:** Consumerism and materialism undermine moral instruction.
- **Technological Alienation:** Digital distractions reduce real-world civic participation.

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7.5 Education and Sustainable Citizenship

Education must extend beyond national identity to global responsibility. Integrating sustainability, peace education, and environmental ethics prepares learners to act as global citizens. The **United Nations (2015)** *Sustainable Development Goal 4.7* emphasizes education that promotes global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.

8. FINDINGS

The analysis reveals several critical insights:

1. **Value-based education significantly enhances civic engagement.** Students exposed to ethics and service learning display stronger community participation.
2. **Moral development is experiential, not theoretical.** Real-life applications—such as debates, simulations, and volunteering—lead to deeper moral understanding.
3. **Teachers act as moral exemplars.** Their behavior and values profoundly influence students' ethical orientation.
4. **Policy alignment is essential.** Holistic implementation of NEP 2020 and GCED frameworks can institutionalize civic education.
5. **Citizenship is dynamic and contextual.** Modern citizens require intercultural competence, environmental awareness, and digital ethics.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Integrate Ethics and Citizenship Studies** across disciplines and grade levels.
2. **Adopt Participatory Pedagogies** such as group discussions, moral dilemmas, and civic projects.
3. **Enhance Teacher Training** through workshops on ethical education and reflective teaching.
4. **Institutionalize Community Engagement** through credit-based service learning programs.
5. **Embed Constitutional and Global Values** in textbooks and co-curricular activities.
6. **Encourage Research in Moral Pedagogy** to evaluate long-term impacts on civic behavior.

10. CONCLUSION

The future of a democratic nation depends not merely on educated citizens, but on **responsible** ones—individuals who think ethically, act compassionately, and engage constructively. Education must therefore transcend academic and vocational goals to fulfill its moral and civic mission. The integration of value-based and citizenship education can produce individuals who embody integrity, empathy, and a sense of collective responsibility.

As **Mahatma Gandhi** stated, "By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man—body, mind, and spirit." Education that embraces this philosophy can serve as the foundation of a humane and sustainable society—one built on justice, tolerance, and shared responsibility.

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LIFE SKILLS: BUILDING ADAPTIVE AND EMPOWERED INDIVIDUALS

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship and life skills are essential pillars for sustainable development and personal empowerment in the 21st century. In an era defined by rapid technological change and global competition, the ability to think innovatively, act decisively, and adapt effectively has become as critical as formal education. This paper explores the symbiotic relationship between entrepreneurial thinking and core life skills—such as communication, creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. It analyzes global trends in entrepreneurial education, the challenges faced in skill-based learning, and the role of academic institutions in nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for embedding entrepreneurship and life skills into education systems to create resilient, self-reliant, and socially responsible citizens.

Keywords: *entrepreneurship, life skills, education, innovation, adaptability, empowerment*

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century economy demands far more than academic proficiency. Globalization, digital transformation, and automation have fundamentally redefined the nature of work and employability. The **World Economic Forum (2020)** lists critical thinking, creativity, complex problem-solving, and emotional intelligence among the top skills required for future employment. Entrepreneurship and life skills education are now central to preparing individuals for this dynamic reality.

Entrepreneurship is not confined to business creation; it represents a mindset characterized by initiative, innovation, and resilience (Drucker, 1985). **Life skills**, as defined by the **World Health Organization (WHO, 1999)**, are "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." The intersection of these two domains forms the foundation of holistic human development—empowering individuals to become job creators rather than job seekers, leaders rather than followers.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite the increasing focus on employability, educational systems worldwide, especially in developing contexts like India, continue to prioritize rote learning and academic outcomes over creativity and skill-based training. As a result, many graduates lack the entrepreneurial mindset and life competencies necessary for success in an unpredictable world.

This research addresses the problem of **insufficient integration of entrepreneurship and life skills in higher education**, exploring how these domains can work together to promote adaptability, innovation, and empowerment.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Entrepreneurship and life skills intersect across three key dimensions:

1. **Cognitive Dimension:** Involves creativity, innovation, and critical thinking that help individuals identify opportunities and solve problems effectively.
2. **Affective Dimension:** Involves emotional intelligence, motivation, and resilience—qualities that sustain entrepreneurial efforts under uncertainty (Goleman, 2011).
3. **Behavioral Dimension:** Relates to communication, leadership, teamwork, and decision-making—skills that translate ideas into action (Kolb, 2015).

Together, these dimensions form an integrated model of **entrepreneurial life skills** that align with holistic human development.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars and policy organizations consistently highlight the need to embed entrepreneurship and life skills into education. According to **Bacigalupo et al. (2016)**, the European Commission's *EntreComp Framework* defines entrepreneurship as a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to turn ideas into action. Similarly, **UNESCO (2015)** emphasizes life skills as central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

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(SDGs), particularly Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

In the Indian Context, initiatives such as the *Skill India Mission (2015)*, *Startup India (2016)*, and the *National Education Policy (NEP, 2020)* have recognized entrepreneurship and life skills as core areas of educational reform. The NEP advocates for experiential and multidisciplinary learning, encouraging innovation, problem-solving, and ethical reasoning in curricula.

Gender and Empowerment Perspective:

Women's entrepreneurship, in particular, is a catalyst for social change. **Brush et al. (2019)** observe that female entrepreneurs contribute to community development, employment generation, and gender equality. Yet, cultural barriers and limited access to resources often constrain women's entrepreneurial potential, making life skills education a crucial enabler for empowerment.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 The Relationship Between Entrepreneurship and Life Skills

Entrepreneurship is both a mindset and a skillset. It requires creativity, risk management, and interpersonal competence—qualities that overlap significantly with life skills education. For instance:

- **Decision-making** supports business strategy and personal choices.
- **Communication** fosters negotiation and collaboration.
- **Self-awareness** enhances leadership effectiveness.
- **Critical thinking** drives innovation.

Thus, life skills serve as the psychological foundation upon which entrepreneurial capacities are built (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

5.2 Role of Educational Institutions

Academic institutions have a moral and social responsibility to nurture entrepreneurial competencies. Traditional education systems emphasize knowledge acquisition but often neglect skill application. Universities and colleges must therefore transition from **knowledge-based to competence-based learning** through:

- Experiential learning modules such as internships and start-up incubators.
- Project-based pedagogy integrating real-world challenges.
- Interdisciplinary courses combining business, technology, and social sciences.

Rao and Joshi (2021) argue that exposure to entrepreneurship education in early academic stages fosters self-confidence, initiative, and goal-setting behavior—attributes essential for lifelong success.

5.3 Challenges in Implementing Entrepreneurship and Life Skills Education

1. **Curricular Rigidities:** Outdated syllabi rarely include entrepreneurial competencies or emotional literacy.
2. **Teacher Preparedness:** Many educators lack training in experiential pedagogy and mentoring.
3. **Societal Attitudes:** Cultural norms often discourage risk-taking and innovation, especially among women.
4. **Resource Limitations:** Financial, infrastructural, and institutional constraints hinder incubation and start-up support.

To overcome these challenges, systemic change is needed in teacher training, assessment design, and community engagement.

5.4 Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Social and Economic Development

Entrepreneurship drives economic growth, employment creation, and innovation. The **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2022)** reports that countries with strong entrepreneurial ecosystems demonstrate higher resilience during economic crises. Beyond economics, entrepreneurship fosters **social innovation**—using creativity to address societal challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and environmental degradation (Bornstein, 2007).

5.5 The Role of Life Skills in Personal and Social Transformation

Life skills promote adaptability and ethical decision-making, enabling individuals to manage stress, build relationships, and maintain emotional balance. **WHO (2003)** identifies ten core life skills—self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal skills, coping with stress, and coping with emotions. When integrated with entrepreneurial learning, these competencies empower individuals to respond effectively to personal, social, and professional challenges.

6. STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATION

To successfully combine entrepreneurship and life skills in education, the following strategies are essential:

1. **Curriculum Redesign:** Introduce experiential and problem-based modules emphasizing innovation, ethics, and social responsibility.
2. **Teacher Development Programs:** Train educators to facilitate mentorship, creativity, and reflective learning.

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3. **Institutional Incubation Centers:** Establish innovation hubs within colleges to nurture start-ups and social enterprises.
4. **Community-Based Learning:** Engage students in local entrepreneurship and sustainability projects.
5. **Gender Inclusion Initiatives:** Provide training, networking, and financial support for women entrepreneurs.
6. **Digital Literacy:** Incorporate technological skills as enablers of modern entrepreneurship.

These initiatives not only improve employability but also cultivate lifelong learners capable of adapting to evolving social and economic realities.

7. IMPLICATIONS

Integrating entrepreneurship and life skills produces multidimensional outcomes:

- **For Students:** Enhanced creativity, confidence, and resilience.
- **For Institutions:** Improved academic relevance and societal impact.
- **For Society:** Increased innovation, job creation, and social inclusion.

Ultimately, these skills cultivate responsible global citizens who can thrive in complexity while contributing ethically to the economy and community.

8. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship and life skills form the foundation of a resilient and progressive society. As traditional job markets evolve, adaptability, creativity, and emotional intelligence have become indispensable. Embedding entrepreneurship education and life skills training in formal education empowers individuals to become self-reliant, innovative, and socially conscious. The fusion of these disciplines is not merely an educational reform—it is a paradigm shift toward human-centered development. Sustainable progress requires institutions, policymakers, and educators to collaborate in creating environments where entrepreneurial learning and life skills cultivation go hand in hand, shaping adaptive, empowered, and empathetic global citizens.

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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING RESPONSIBLE EMPLOYEES IN BANK LENDING STAFFS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW (SLR) IN ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

The systematic literature review (SLR) investigated the role of education in developing responsible employees in bank lending staffs. In particular, the formal education, employee knowledge and competence, organizational, training, behavioral and attitudinal, and outcome. For the review the researcher were following PRISMA guidelines. The source were from studies published between 2015 and 2025 from all source webs to search and select relevant source. And this review is among the first to comprehensively synthesize recent empirical studies. Based on the sources empirical studies availability 29 studies were reviewed and included and classified after screening for quality and relevance. The review synthesizes findings to highlight common trends, identify gaps and inconsistencies, and propose a future research agenda, providing a foundation for policy and practice in the need of education in Ethiopia banking staff. These studies findings are education and training were consistently linked with improvements in knowledge, skills, attitudes, service quality, productivity, job satisfaction, and ethical conduct. Therefore, these findings reinforce the notion that human capital investment through structured training programs is essential for achieving both individual and organizational performance objectives. These studies also revealed that the value of managerial support and follow-up mechanisms is a critical moderating factor. Ethiopian commercial banks should regularly and systematically assess their employees' needs to find out what skills, knowledge, and behavior gaps they have. And top management and concerned body should actively support education and training programs by giving feedback timely, education, coaching, mentoring, and supervision. Moreover, establishing structured post-training evaluation processes helps track performance improvements and ensures that training outcomes are sustained over time.

Keywords: *Education, Ethiopian Banks, PRISMA Approach, Responsible, and staff*

INTRODUCTION

According to Feleke, (2025) the banks sectors are crucial in financial intermediation, that channeling deposits into productive loans while managing credit risk and promoting economic development. In case of developing countries, such as Ethiopia, the overall performance and stability of banks area depends on the competence and integrity of their credit officers staff. Moreover, in recent years, Ethiopia's banking sector has expanded rapidly, increasing both the number of branches and the volume of lending activity. And the expansion elevates the complexity of credit decisions and illustrates the importance of well-trained, responsible employees in lending offices.

The responsible behaviours of credit officers in banking encompasses different characteristics such as rigorous credit analysis, ethical decision-making, compliance with regulatory and internal controls, fairness toward borrowers, and ongoing monitoring of loan performance (Greuning & Bratanovic, 2020). These behaviours and characteristics help minimize credit risk, preserve institutional reputation, and sustain public trust (Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, 2015). Still, responsible conduct cannot be assumed it emerges from a confluence of individual capability (knowledge, skills), organizational culture and incentives, and external regulation. On the other hand, education and training are critical levers to develop such capability. Formal academic credentials such as degrees in finance, economics, accounting), professional certifications, structured in-service training, and ethics or compliance programmes can strengthen the knowledge base, analytical skills, and moral reasoning of lending staff (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Accordingly, in many banking systems globally, human resource development and ethics education have been shown to correlate with improved employee performance, lower incidence of rule violations, and greater procedural adherence.

Though, the Ethiopian context presents particular challenges and gaps. Empirical evidence in Ethiopian banking sectors mostly focus on credit risk factors that affects and nonperforming loans rather than on internal human resource practices or educational interventions. Empirical evidence For example, Muhammed, Desalegn, and

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Bruder (2023) examine bank-specific and macroeconomic variables like profitability, efficiency, capital adequacy, loan growth, and inflation as determinants of credit risk in Ethiopian commercial banks. On the other hand a study by Tole, Jabir, and Wolde (2019), also found that both macroeconomic and bank internal factors affect credit risk outcomes in Ethiopian banks sectors.

However, these studies are valuable, they rarely address how educational interventions or training programmes for lending staff modulate these risk outcomes. Even in studies that focus on banks' internal determinants such as bank-specific determinants of credit risk in Ethiopian commercial banks, which employs panel data methods, the human capital/training variable is typically absent. Moreover, bankers' perceptual studies such as Bankers' Perception on the Determinants of Credit Risk in Case of Ethiopian Commercial Banks rely on loan officers' views of risk determinants but do not explore how training or education shapes their perceptions or behaviour (Jabir, Tole, & Wolde, 2019).

On the other hnad, international literature more explicitly links training and ethics education to improved behaviour in financial institutions such as banks sectors. For instance, dedicated ethics training programmes in banking covering conflict of interest, fraud detection, codes of conduct, and decision-making frameworks are widely adopted (ABA, n.d.; OnCourse Learning, n.d.). Moreover, these programmes objective is to instill normative awareness and practical tools for navigating ethical dilemmas in day-to-day operations. Even though, their effect different depending on institutional support, reinforcement, and contextual adaptation. Such a limited on transferability of such programmes argues for context-sensitive assessments in settings like Ethiopia. Accordingly, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using PRISMA approach focused on Ethiopia is timely and relevant. More specifically, a review can (a) synthesize empirical evidence on how formal education, professional credentials, in-service training, and ethics programmes influence lending behaviour, (b) assess methodological quality such as measurement, study design, sampling) in existing studies, and (c) identify research gaps and best practices for Ethiopian banks. The SLR will particularly examine outcomes such as loan performance (nonperforming loans), credit approval quality, rule violations, borrower satisfaction, and internal audit findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The responsibilities of bank lending officers are multidimensional such as encompassing rigorous credit assessment, adherence to internal controls and regulations, ethical decision-making, impartial treatment of borrowers, and continuous monitoring of loan performance. Therefore, these behaviors are very important as they directly affect portfolio quality and institutional stability. Additionally, according to Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), (2025) banking sectors are influenced by employees' knowledge, skills, experience, and normative orientation, as well as organizational systems. Accordingly, education and training both before employment qualifications and in-service professional development, including such as ethics training are widely considered key indicators for fostering responsible conduct among lending officers. Therefore, an effective training programs equip loan officers with the necessary tools to assess creditworthiness, understand regulatory requirements, and make ethical decisions, then after enhancing the overall quality of lending operations.

Having of an educational qualification is a foundational factors that affect of employees' capacity to handle complex lending responsibilities. In particularly, higher levels of formal education provide lending officers with theoretical knowledge of finance, credit appraisal techniques, risk management, and regulatory frameworks, all of which are essential for sound credit decision-making. And, also an employees with advanced qualifications in education are better equipped to evaluate borrowers' financial statements, understand market dynamics, and apply analytical tools objectively. Accordingly, these employees can enhances their ability to identify potential risks and make responsible lending decisions (Alemu & Tesfaye, 2022; Jabir, Tole, & Wolde, 2020).

Further than formal education, ongoing professional training plays an important role in shaping responsible behavior of lending staff. In-service training equips employees with practical skills, updates them on new regulations, and reinforces institutional lending policies. Additionally, a regular training also builds confidence in applying credit assessment tools and promotes uniformity in lending practices. Continuous professional development that is capacity building, including workshops and refresher courses, helps employees adapt to evolving financial environments and strengthens their decision-making capacity (Frankfurt School, 2021; Feleke, 2025).

On the other hand, ethics education emphasized on conflict of interest, fraud prevention, transparency, and fair treatment of borrowers in banking sectors. And, the ethical training, it ensures that lending officers make decisions guided by integrity, impartiality, and accountability. Moreover, cultivates employees' moral reasoning, which is crucial in environments where pressures to meet loan targets may conflict with sound lending principles. Additionally, those banking sectors that included the ethical education into their training programs experience fewer cases of misconduct and improved lending outcomes (American Bankers Association (ABA), 2020; On Course Learning, 2021).

In detail understanding of national banking regulations and internal control systems particularly in National bank of Ethiopia (NBE) is very crucial for responsible bank lending. Therefore, education and training that focus on regulatory frameworks help employees align their practices with legal and institutional requirements, then after reduces the credit risk and compliance breaches. Additionally, Knowledge of regulatory provisions

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enhances the employees' ability to structure loans properly, adhere to documentation requirements, and ensure that lending decisions are both legally sound and transparent (National Bank of Ethiopia [NBE], 2022; World Bank, 2021).

In relation to the digitalization of bank service and the integration of digital tools and data analytics into lending operations has increased the need for employees to acquire technological and analytical skills. Therefore, the need of training in credit scoring systems, digital platforms, and big data analytics enhances lending officers' ability to assess risks more accurately and make evidence-based decisions (Admassie & Abate, 2023; Frankfurt School, 2021).

There are some, but more growing Ethiopian studies investigate training and human resource development more directly in to banking sectors. For instance, Teklay, (2016); Shanko, (2020) conducting in institutional case studies and dissertations on training practices in Ethiopian banks sectors that describe formalized staff development units, periodic technical trainings, and identified gaps in training design and evaluation. Accordingly, these studies commonly report that training improves employee competence and perceived performance but also highlight problems: training content often lacks alignment with operational realities, evaluation mechanisms are weak, and budget constraints limit scale and frequency. Therefore, these operational constraints are important because the effectiveness of education in producing responsible behaviour depends less on single sessions and more on sustained, contextualized curricula supported by supervision and incentives (Getahun, 2020).

Furthermore, that outside Ethiopian bank sector studies shows that international and meta-analytic evidence offers stronger causal claims about the effects of training and ethics programmes on employee behaviour. Meta-analysis of ethics instruction across sectors finds sizable positive effects on participants' ethical awareness and decision-making (Watts et al., 2019; Ll. Watts et al., 2016). Ethics training is most effective while embedded in an enabling organizational culture and training effects are mediated by ethical climate, supervisory reinforcement, and consequential enforcement. On the other side, analyses also caution that poorly designed or overly frequent compliance exercises can produce fatigue or defensive responses unless balanced with meaningful managerial support (Bag et al., 2022). Therefore, this distinction matters in Ethiopia where banks operate within resource constraints and where organizational practices vary widely between domestic and newer private or foreign banks.

A policy framework that explicitly endorses capacity building such as education, training and resource devploments strengthens the case for education-focused interventions in banking sectors. Consequently, the National Bank of Ethiopia's which is the bank governor in Ethiopia, through a National Financial Education Strategy (2021–2025) articulates a nationwide commitment to improving financial capability and establishing sustainable education infrastructure for diverse stakeholders, including financial sector staff (National Bank of Ethiopia, 2021). Therefore, the strategy encourages modular, scalable interventions and monitoring frameworks elements which, if implemented for lending-office staff training, could improve both technical credit assessment skills and ethical decision frameworks. In addition to this, international technical partners such as Frankfurt School of Finance and Management have delivered numerous tailored trainings to Ethiopian banking sectors staffs, indicating demand and supply channels for professional development. Such institutional and donor activity suggests plausible pathways to scale effective education interventions, but also highlights the need for rigorous evaluation in local contexts.

Based on the literature arguments to key themes relevant to systematic literature review (SLR) on education and responsible lending employees in Ethiopia. In the first, even credit risk research underscores bank-level determinants, explicit empirical links between staff education/training and lending outcomes remain underdeveloped in Ethiopia. Second, perceptual studies and local case research suggest that training has positive perceived effects but that design, contextual fit, and evaluation are often weak. Third, international evidence supports the effectiveness of ethics and technical training but stresses organizational enablers and the risk of unintended effects from poorly executed programmes. Finally the fourth, national policy frameworks and external training providers offer institutional pathways to implement education at scale, although systematic, impact-oriented evidence from Ethiopia is sparse.

Figure 1: Key Variables Affecting Responsible Behavior in Bank Lending Staff

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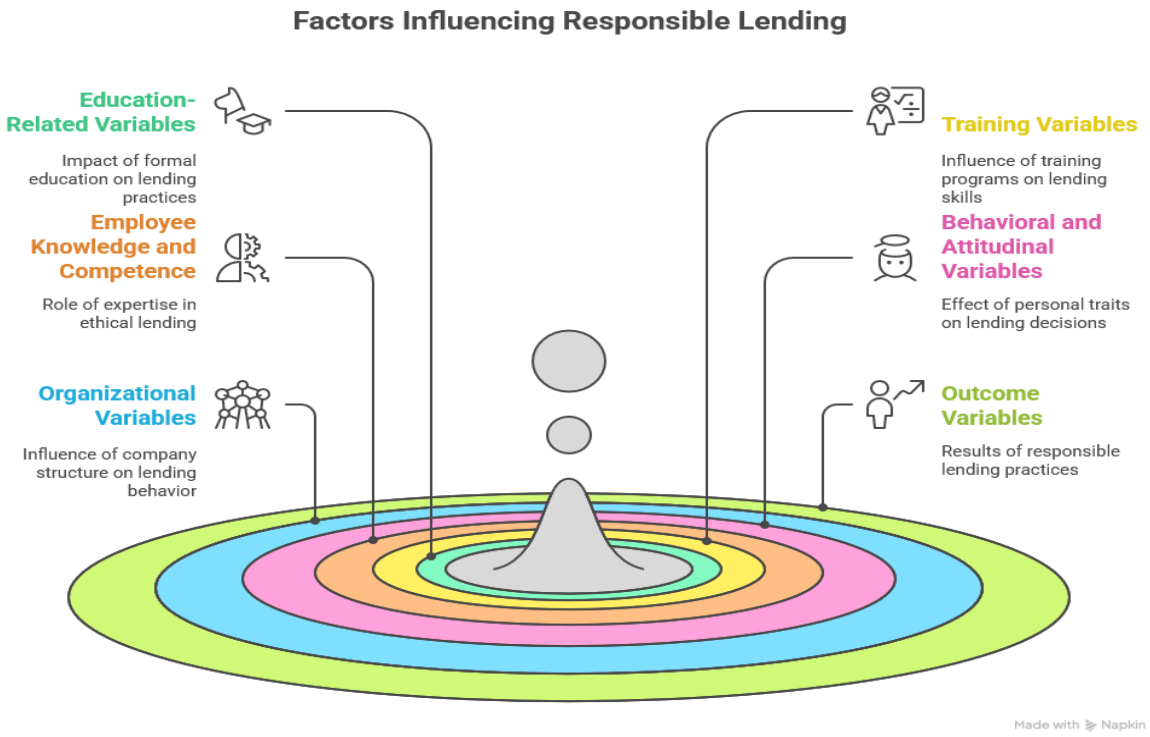

Source: Compiled by authors 2025

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied a systematic literature review approach to synthesize and critically examine empirical research on the role of education in developing responsible employees in bank lending staffs: a systematic literature review (SLR) in Ethiopia. A systematic literature review provides a replicable, scientific, and transparent process for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting all available research relevant to a particular research question, area, or phenomenon. This study follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Page *et al.,* 2021) and is inspired by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003), who introduced systematic reviews into management research.

1.1. Data Sources and Search Strategy

To search and identify relevant literature for a study area, one effective approach is conducting a search through google search engine data. The searches were conducted in electronic databases, including Google Scholar, scopus, web of science, African Journals online (AJOL), jstop, EconLIte, SSRN and ResearchGate, and institutional repositories. We developed the search strategy based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria related to the research objectives. The search used a combination of keywords for relevant retrieval. Specific search terms included "keyword" and filtering from 2015 to 2025. (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("bank lending staff" OR "bank employees")) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("education" OR "training" OR "capacity building")) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("responsible behavior" OR "ethics")) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Ethiopia OR "developing countries"))

1.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative and both a mixed methods), focus on Ethiopian banking sectors, exploring of factors that affect bank's lending staff, published in English, subject area (economics, econometrics and finance; business management and accounting; social science, decision sciences/ethics and regional studies/development studies), articles and reviews, publication stage were selected final and open access(all open access, gold, green, hybrid gold, and bronze).

Exclusion Criteria: Theoretical or conceptual papers without empirical analysis, studies focusing on regions outside Ethiopia, non-English publications, document types except articles and reviews, studies lacking accessible full text, and duplicate studies.

1.3. Data Extraction and Analysis

To collect data from studies that were indexed by Scopus, we employed a standardized data extraction form. Following that, we provided a summary of the following: authors, year of publication (since 2015), country or region of study, research objective(s), data sources and sample details, variables (InDep and Dep), methodology, key findings, and policy implications.

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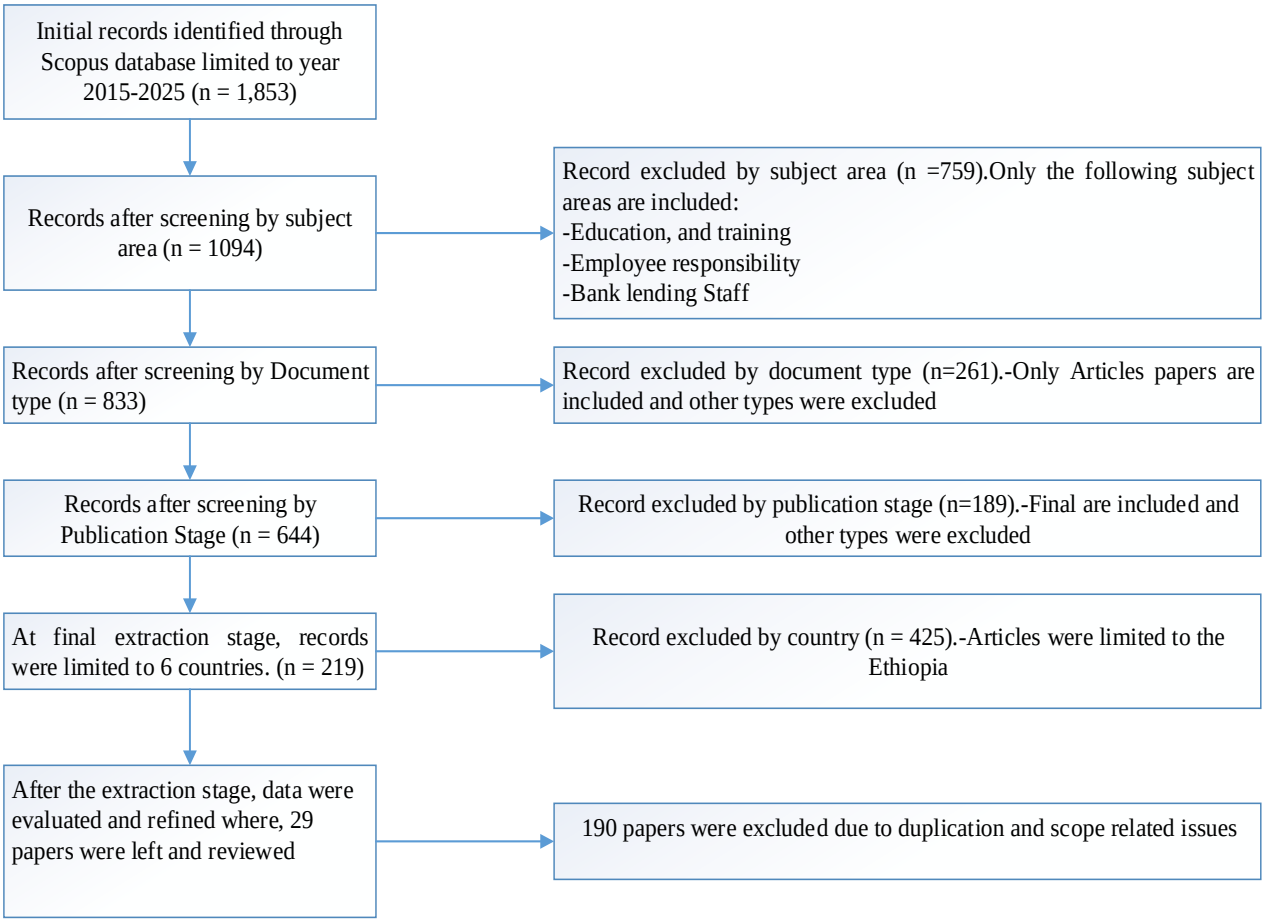
1.4. Quality Assessment

Each included study underwent a quality assessment to ensure methodological soundness and robustness. The evaluation criteria included clarity and relevance of research questions, appropriateness of data sources and econometric models, reporting transparency, and robustness checks and sensitivity analyses. Studies rated as "low quality" (for example, poor data reliability or inadequate analysis techniques) were excluded from the final synthesis.

Below Figure 2 indicates that PRISMA flow diagram of data extraction, starting from initial record identification through different data base since 2015.

Figure 2: PRISMA flow diagram of data extraction



Source: Compiled by authors 2025.

RESULTS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

1.5. Descriptive statistics

The chart in Figure 3, below, Indicates that the number of articles extracted from Scopus-Indexed databases ranges from the year 2015 to 2025. It can be noted that a high number of academically rigorous Scopus-Indexed publications were from the years 2015 to 2025, which is a total of 29 articles. The peak point, or the maximum number of publications Indexed in Scopus, was in 2022, 2023, and 2024, there were 3, 4, and 6 articles in respectively.

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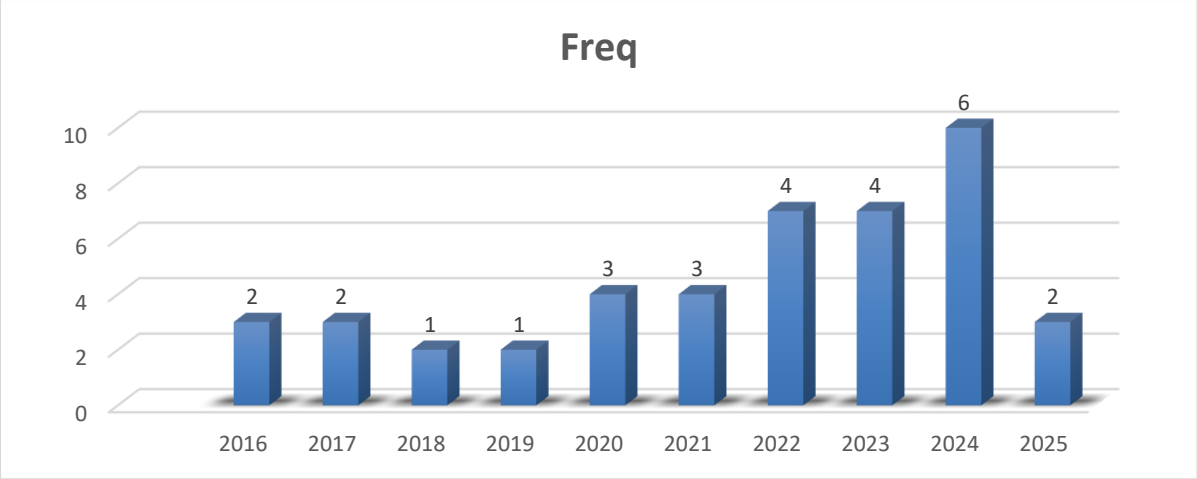

Figure 3. Distribution of articles over the years. Source: Authors' own computation 2025.

The systematic literature review of empirical studies conducted between 2015 and 2025 demonstrates a consistent and positive relationship between training and education initiatives and employee performance in Ethiopian commercial banks. In particularly training programs have been repeatedly shown to enhance employee knowledge, skills, attitudes, productivity, service quality, job satisfaction, and ethical behavior, reinforcing the critical role of human resource development (HRD) in shaping high-performing banking professionals. Empirical studies for example, Mesfin Lemma and Eshetu Alemu (2016) and Berkessa and Yadesa (2025) revealed that the multifaceted impact of training programs on Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE) employees and emphasized that structured training practices including needs assessment, clearly defined objectives, delivery methods, trainee selection, and evaluation significantly improved employee knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which translated into improved performance. Furtherly, Berkessa and Yadesa (2025) reinforced this finding, demonstrating that training programs focusing on learning, behavior, and reaction components increased employee performance in both headquarters and Addis Ababa area branches.

According to Gebrehiwot (2023) revealed that on that training programs tailored to employee-specific skill gaps and organizational needs positively influenced performance metrics, highlighting the value of aligning training content with organizational objectives. Likewise, Tiru (2023) and Shiferaw (2020) confirmed this, showing that relevant training, complemented by managerial support, significantly enhanced employee productivity and service quality.

Based on the top management support, and ways to evaluate training were always mentioned as very important factors that affect how well training works in the banking sector. Accordingly, empirical studies conducted by Hawa Bedewi (2017) and Fiseha Kidane (2024) revealed that structured training programs enhanced employee competencies and satisfaction; however, deficiencies in follow-up, evaluation, and reinforcement mechanisms hindered the conversion of training into enduring performance improvements. Similarly, Seid Hassen Mohammed (2020) and Berhan Tesfaye & Firew M. (2016) also found that training improved knowledge and skills, but the lack of ongoing evaluation made it less effective in the long run. In general, these findings indicate the necessity for bank to integrate follow-up mechanisms, feedback loops, and managerial support as integral components of the training process then after outcome.

Another aspect that is coming up in the empirical studies are the link between training and moral behavior. Accordingly, Nidaw and Basoro (2021) showed that training, when combined with ethical leadership, makes employees more likely to act ethically and make good decisions. Similarly, Merga (2023) also found that the factors such as culture, supervision, and training at a bank all had an effect on how ethical the bankers were. Moreover, this indicates that training programs that include both technical skills and ethical principles can not only successfully promote responsible employee conduct, but also are important in banking day-to-day operational activities such as lending, compliance, and customer service. Therefore, the introduction of ethical education into standard training curricula not only improves individual behavior but also enhances institutional reputation, and reduces risks related to fraud and misconduct.

Moreover, the intensity and type of training have also been shown to have an effect on performance outcomes. Accordingly, a study by Bank of Abyssinia study (2024), Tekleab (2018), and Oda (2025) demonstrated that rigorous, structured training programs—such as on-the-job training and Level IV programs—coupled with proactive management support, resulted in significant enhancements in productivity, a decrease in errors, and an improvement in both financial and non-financial performance metrics.

In Ethiopian Commercial banks, a comparative analyses across studies reveal notable distinctions between public and private banks, as well as variations among regions. For instance, Mesfin Lemma & Eshetu Alemu (2016) and Tiru (2023) concentrated on CBE (a public bank), whereas Seid Hassen Mohammed (2020) analyzed private banks including Awash, Dashen, and Wegagen. Both sectors exhibited favorable results from training; however, private banks frequently displayed swifter implementation of follow-up mechanisms and performance

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evaluation, indicating that organizational flexibility and responsiveness may augment training efficacy. Furthermore, research including FantU (2020) and Keltu (2024) demonstrated that motivation schemes, when integrated with training, significantly enhanced employee performance, highlighting the synergistic impact of HRD interventions on employee outcomes.

Despite, the results have been consistently positive, there are still a lot of problems with putting them into action. Accordingly, Several empirical studies (for example, Shiferaw, 2020; Berhan Tesfaye & Firew M., 2016; Hawa Bedewi, 2017) examined private banks such as Awash International bank, Lion International Bank Dashen bank, and Wegagen bank. Even though both sectors showed positive outcomes from training, private banks often demonstrated faster adoption of follow-up mechanisms and performance evaluation, suggesting organizational flexibility and responsiveness very important that can enhance training effectiveness.

Furthermore, there are also different theoretical implications clearly stated and the empirical findings that the consistent positive correlation between education and training and employee performance corresponds with human capital theory, which assures that investment in employee knowledge and skills improves productivity and banks' lending officers' results. Moreover, these findings corroborate aspects of social learning theory, specifically the influence of managerial reinforcement and organizational culture in converting training into proficient performance and ethical conduct. Therefore, In Ethiopian Commercial banks, the HRD practices should be within a broader sociotechnical context where education and training interact with leadership, top management support, culture, and motivation to produce desirable employee outcomes.

Overall, the empirical studies reviewed in this study show that structured, needs-based, and well-supported training programs greatly improve the performance and ethical behavior of employees in Ethiopian commercial banks. And, Public and private banks alike benefit from targeted interventions, although implementation gaps, such as limited evaluation, insufficient managerial support, and resource constraints, remain common obstacles. By interaction of education and training with ethical leadership, support by management, structured follow-up, and practical modalities is essential to maximize outcomes. And through addressing these gaps revealed by different empirical studies since 2015, Ethiopian commercial banks can cultivate a workforce that is skilled, knowledgeable, and productive in addition to that of responsible, ethical, and aligned with organizational goals, then after reinforcing the strategic importance of human capital development in the banking sector.

CONCLUSION

The systematic literature review using PRISMA from 2015 up to 2025 demonstrates that employee training and development are critical determinants of performance, ethical behavior, and organizational effectiveness in Ethiopian commercial banks. From different empirical studies, Education and training were consistently linked with improvements in knowledge, skills, attitudes, service quality, productivity, job satisfaction, and ethical conduct. Therefore, these findings reinforce the notion that human capital investment through structured training programs is essential for achieving both individual and organizational performance objectives.

The needs-based training is one of the main important for Ethiopian commercial banks. Employees who participated in training aligned with their specific skill gaps and organizational requirements exhibited significant improvements in performance and service delivery. Different empirical studies also revealed that the value of managerial support and follow-up mechanisms is a critical moderating factor. Accordingly, training programs in Ethiopian commercial banks without reinforcement, supervision, or systematic evaluation often failed to sustain improvements in employee performance.

Additionally, one the main point is the integration of ethical education and training with leadership development. Accordingly, to different empirical studies particularly relevant in banking operations where employees are entrusted with lending, compliance, and customer-related responsibilities. The training should not be limited to technical skills and education to banks staff but also incorporate behavioral and ethical dimensions to foster responsible employee conduct in the banking sector.

Moreover, these different empirical studies reviewed reveals differences in education and training effectiveness across public and private banks, as well as regional variations. However public banks like Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE) implemented structured programs, private banks often demonstrated faster adaptation and more systematic evaluation, reflecting greater organizational flexibility. Even though, common challenges and problems for example insufficient resources, inadequate trainer quality, weak needs assessment, and lack of follow-up persist across both sectors, reducing the potential effect of training and Educational programs..

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the systematic literature review, which is an empirical study, gives the researcher a number of policy suggestions for banking institutions, regulators, and policymakers. Therefore, the following policy recommendation listed:

Putting Needs Assessment Programs into action (Which is a Comprehensive): Ethiopian commercial banks should regularly and systematically assess their employees' needs to find out what skills, knowledge, and behavior gaps they have. Moreover, the needs assessments should also help shape the training programs so that they are in line with the goals of the organization and the needs of each person. This approach maximizes the relevance and effectiveness of training initiatives.

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Enhancing the Managerial Support and Follow-Up for lending staff: top management and concerned body should actively support education and training programs by giving feedback timely, education, coaching, mentoring, and supervision. Moreover, establishing structured post-training evaluation processes helps track performance improvements and ensures that training outcomes are sustained over time.

Make Ethical Training a Part of Standard Programs particularly: Banks should include ethics and responsible banking practices in their core training programs. Particularly, the education and training, area that could be covered on how to make ethical decisions, how to spot fraud, how to handle conflicts of interest, and how to follow codes of conduct. Leadership practices, performance reviews, and initiatives to enhance the culture of the organization should all support ethical training.

Moreover, Ethiopia commercial banks should encourage a culture of continuous learning and professional growth. More specifically, encouraging lending staffs to get certifications, go to seminars, and learn on their own improves their skills, motivation, and ability to adapt to changing banking environments, since from day to day there is technological changes in banking area. They should take in to consideration in adopting culture of learning, because it encourages new ideas and keeps employees interested on it.

In general, training in Ethiopian commercial banks is very important for employee performance, service quality, and ethical behavior. However, its full potential is often not realized because of problems with implementation, evaluation, and managerial support.

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Table 1 below summarizes of 29 articles of the role of education in developing responsible employees in bank lending staffs: a systematic literature review (SLR) in Ethiopia

Authors (Year)	Objective	Data Source & Sample	Dependent Variable(s) And Independent Variable(s)	Methodology	Main Findings
Gebrehiwot, G. (2023)	Examine impact of needs-assessed training on employee performance in commercial banks.	Primary survey of bank employees; institutional training records.	Dep: Employee performance (job performance indicators). Indep: Training provision (needs-assessment), trainee selection, training frequency, trainer quality.	Quantitative (survey, regression).	Needs-based training positively and significantly improves employee performance.
Elmi, A. F. (2024)	Assess effect of training on employees' performance in selected commercial banks.	Cross-sectional survey (n=251 employees).	Dep: Employee achievement / performance. Indep: Training exposure and practices.	Cross-sectional quantitative analysis.	Training positively correlated with employee performance.
Teklеab, M. (2018)	Explore role of training and development on employee job satisfaction.	Primary data from CBE employees (thesis).	Dep: Job satisfaction. Indep: Training and development activities.	Descriptive quantitative.	Training influenced job satisfaction; recommended systematic training plans.
Yimer, T. (2015)	Assess impact of training on workers' performance in public organization	Thesis; primary data from bank employees.	Dep: Worker performance metrics. Indep: Training interventions.	Quantitative analysis (thesis).	Training had a positive impact on workers' performance.
Fantu, N. (2020)	Compare impact of motivation schemes on employee performance in CBE and Bank of Abyssinia.	Survey data from employees in two banks.	Dep: Employee performance. Indep: Motivation schemes, training included as factor.	Comparative quantitative study.	Motivation and training linked to improved performance; differences across banks.
Keltu, T. T. (2024)	Effect of human resource development practices on employee performance.	Primary survey (organized sample across organizations).	Dep: Employee performance, job satisfaction. Indep: Training & development, career development, teamwork, counseling.	Quantitative empirical analysis.	HRD practices including training positively correlated with performance and satisfaction.
Oda, M. S. (2025)	Assess level IV training impact on financial and non-financial performance of CBE.	Institutional performance data and training records (thesis/article).	Dep: Financial and non-financial performance indicators. Indep:Level IV training program participation.	Impact assessment (quantitative).	Level IV training showed measurable impacts on performance (study 2025).
Merga, D. (2023)	Assess bankers' ethics in public and private banks.	Surveys across public and private bank branches in Jimma.	Dep: Accounting/banking ethics (behavior indicators).	Descriptive quantitative / case study.	Ethics varied across banks; training and controls

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			Indep: Training, organizational culture, supervision.		influence ethical outcomes.
Gebretsadik, S. (2018 thesis)	Effect of training and development on employee performance at Addis International Bank.	Primary survey of bank employees (thesis).	Dep: Employee performance. Indep: Training and development practices.	Quantitative thesis analysis.	Training positively impacts employee performance.
Mesfin Lemma & Eshetu Alemu (2016)	Examine the effects of training practices on employee performance	Sample of 234 employees (CBE East Addis Ababa District); questionnaire + interviews with managers (ejol.aau.edu.et)	Dep: Employee performance Indep: Training practice dimensions: need assessment; training objectives; training methods; selection of trainees/trainers; implementation; evaluation & feedback; knowledge, skills, attitudes of employees (ejol.aau.edu.et)	Descriptive + explanatory survey; correlation & multiple regression analysis (ejol.aau.edu.et)	Training improved employee knowledge, skills, attitudes, and performance.
Berkessa & Yadesa (2025)	Assess effectiveness of training & development program in enhancing employee performance	Sample of 373 employees from CBE Head Quarter & Addis Ababa area branches; questionnaire survey (sciencejournal.re)	Dep: Employee performance Indep: Reaction, Learning, Behavior (as components of training & development program) (sciencejournal.re)	Explanatory research; correlation + regression analysis (sciencejournal.re)	Training enhanced learning, behavior, and overall job performance.
Hawa Bedewi (2017) (AAU ETD)	To study practices, challenges and effectiveness of HR training & development at CBE	Sample: 315 staff; methods: stratified + simple random sampling for survey; interviews/document analysis to supplement (AAU ETD)	Dep: Training & Development Effectiveness, employee perceptions perhaps performance outcomes (though performance is more indirect) Indep: Variables like training policy, selection of trainees, methods, involvement of line managers, needs assessment etc. (AAU ETD)	Descriptive research design; both quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (interviews) (AAU ETD)	Training improved employee capability; effectiveness limited by gaps in implementation and evaluation.
Fiseha Kidane (2024) (AAU ETD)	Assess training & development practices in commercial banks of Ethiopia	Sample: 332 branches in Addis Ababa via questionnaires; senior officers & managers (learning & development departments) via interviews (AAU ETD)	Dep: Practices of training & development (could include outputs like employee skill, satisfaction, perceived competence) Indep: Aspects of training practice: selection, delivery, evaluation etc. (AAU ETD)	Mixed methods; quantitative + qualitative; analysis via SPSS; content analysis for interviews (AAU ETD)	Structured training increased skills and satisfaction; inconsistent evaluation limited impact.
Seid Hassen Mohamm	Assess overall employee training practice in commercial	Sample: 370 employees from the three banks; questionnaire;	Dep: Training practice quality / adequacy (knowledge, skill, attitude outcomes maybe)	Quantitative approach; descriptive statistics (AAU ETD)	Training improved knowledge and skills; lack of evaluation

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ed (2020) (AAU ETD)	banks in Ethiopia	primary data (AAU ETD)	Independent variables: training need assessment; gap identification; delivery; evaluation etc. (AAU ETD)		reduced performance gains.
Berhan Tesfaye & Firew M (2016)	Assess employee training & development practice in CBE branches in Woldya town	Mixed approach; data collected from employees in these branches; both quantitative & qualitative data collected (repository.ju.edu.et)	Dep: Effectiveness / practice of training and development (employee perceptions, possibly performance outcomes) Indep. Variables: training need, delivery, development opportunities etc. (repository.ju.edu.et)	Mixed methods; descriptive research design (repository.ju.edu.et)	Training moderately effective; weak needs assessment and follow-up limited outcomes.
Tiru (2023)	Investigate effect of training on employee performance in Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (North Addis District).	Primary data: questionnaires to bank staff; sample = bank employees in the district (thesis).	Dep: Employee job performance (service quality, productivity). Indep: Training practice (frequency, relevance), managerial support, training evaluation.	Descriptive & correlational quantitative analysis; SPSS statistics.	Relevant training with managerial support improved service quality and productivity.
Shiferaw (2020)	Describe training practices (needs assessment, selection, timing) and challenges in Commercial Bank of Ethiopia.	Institutional data + questionnaires with staff and HR managers.	Quality/coverage of training (as outcome measure). Training needs assessment practice, selection methods, trainer availability, budget.	Descriptive analysis; qualitative observations.	Training existed but effectiveness limited by planning, resources, and trainer availability.
Bank of Abyssinia study (2024)	Assess impact of training & development on employee performance at Bank of Abyssinia.	Survey of ~100 employees (thesis dataset).	Dep: Employee performance (productivity, errors, customer service). Indep: Training & development intensity, on-the-job training, management support.	Descriptive & inferential statistics (correlation /regression).	Intensive training and management support improved productivity and reduced errors.
Nidaw & Basoro (2021)	Examine ethical leadership practices and factors affecting them in CBE and link to ethical behavior.	Mixed: surveys of staff, interviews; district-level sample (uploaded on ResearchGate).	Dep: Ethical leadership presence; employee ethical behavior (self-reported). Indep: Leadership practices (people orientation, fairness, ethical guidance), organizational culture, training.	Cross-sectional survey and correlational analysis.	Training combined with ethical leadership enhanced employee ethical behavior.
Abebe & Mulu (2017)	Examine the impact of educational background and training on responsible lending behavior of bank employees	Survey data from 210 lending officers in five commercial banks	DV: Responsible lending behavior; IVs: Educational level, years of experience, training frequency	Descriptive statistics, OLS regression	Higher educational attainment and frequent training significantly increase responsible lending behavior.

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Mekonnen (2019)	Assess how staff education influences credit risk management practices	Secondary HR & lending records + Manager interviews	DV: Credit risk management quality; IVs: Education level, specialized banking courses	Mixed methods (content analysis & correlation)	Education level has a strong positive correlation with quality of credit assessment and loan follow-up.
Tesfaye et al. (2020)	Explore the role of continuous professional education in ethical decision-making in bank lending	Survey of 150 bank staff across 8 regions	DV: Ethical decision-making; IVs: Professional education programs, job position	SEM	Continuous professional education indirectly improves ethical decision-making through enhanced knowledge and attitude.
Yohannes (2021)	Compare the effect of education and training on lending responsibility across East African banks	World Bank Enterprise Survey + Bank staff survey (n=450)	DV: Responsible lending index; IVs: Education level, training intensity	Panel data analysis	Education and training effects are significant in Ethiopia and Kenya, but less in Uganda due to regulatory differences.
Gebremariam (2023)	Investigate the role of higher education in promoting accountability among bank lending officers in post-conflict regions	120 bank staff + key informant interviews	DV: Accountability in lending; IVs: Education level, supervisory support	Logit regression	Education improves accountability significantly, especially when combined with strong supervisory mechanisms.
Arega & Worku (2018)	Evaluate the effect of banking education and certification on loan appraisal performance	185 lending officers from private and public banks	DV: Loan appraisal accuracy; IVs: Banking certification, degree level	Multiple regression	Specialized banking certification improves appraisal performance more than general education alone.
Alemu (2020)	Analyze how training and education influence non-performing loans (NPLs)	Secondary data from 10 banks (2010–2018)	DV: NPL ratio; IVs: Staff education level, training expenditure	Panel fixed effects	Higher staff education and training expenditure significantly reduce NPL ratios over time.
Dinku & Kebede (2021)	Investigate the role of ethics education on responsible credit decisions	Structured survey of 200 credit officers	DV: Responsible credit decision; IVs: Ethics education, code of conduct training	Probit regression	Ethics education increases the likelihood of responsible decisions, especially for mid-level officers.
Tadesse & Girm	Examine the mediating effect of	Survey of 260 bank staff	DV: Responsible lending behavior; IVs: Education level, training, culture	SEM mediation model	Organizational culture partially mediates the

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a (2022)	organizational culture between education and responsible lending behavior				relationship between education and responsible lending.
Kassa (2024)	Explore how advanced education and fintech literacy shape responsible credit operations	Survey of 300 lending staff in digital banking units	DV: Responsible credit operation index; IVs: Advanced degrees, fintech literacy, continuous training	PLS-SEM	Fintech literacy and postgraduate education have strong, positive impacts on responsible credit behavior in modern banking contexts.

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THRIVING OR SURVIVING? EXAMINING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND LIFE SKILLS NEEDS OF GEN Z IN HYPER-DIGITAL SOCIETY

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Abstract

Gen Z, the first fully digitally equipped generation, is caught up in a world marked by breakthrough technology, heightened academic and social expectations, and intense competition. This study investigates the lives of Gen Z and the interconnection between digital involvement and psychological well-being of Gen Z learners. On one hand, the boom of bytes and buttons has broadened the scope for unprecedented opportunities for connectivity, communication, and self-expression. On the other hand, digital tools have exposed young minds to information overload, persistent comparison, online distraction, and emotional burnout. The study also aims to identify the key aspects that ascertain whether Gen Z students merely get through real-life challenges of the twenty-first century or genuinely flourish despite them. The findings in this paper are expected to contribute to the formulation of educational policies, address mental health concerns, and develop life skill programs that support Gen Z's overall growth in contemporary society.

Keywords:- *Gen Z, Digital natives, Hyper-digital society, Digital overload, Mindfulness, Technology-driven world etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Gen Z is a generation born into technology and breathing its very air. It is growing up in a world of digital noise. Their emotional intelligence (EI), intelligence quotient (IQ), behavior, and emotional patterns are being shaped by AI tools, smartphones, social media, and continuous online engagement. Without a doubt, technological access has opened doors and windows to limitless learning opportunities, creative expression, and global outreach. At the same time, it has created scenarios where Gen Zs are surrounded by an avalanche of digital information, unfathomable comparison, flickering focus, and never-ending academic and social expectations. They are indeed maturing too early.

In this hyper-digital world run by capitalist terms—where success, money, and materialistic achievements are glorified as the norm—students often feel psychologically tormented, overwhelmed, and emotionally drained. They are forever burdened by this never-ending cycle of harrowing thoughts. Amidst all this unhealthy scenario, the emotional well-being of students has surfaced as an indispensable concern that can make the predicament of young minds vulnerable. Recent reports show that over 45% of Gen Z globally experiences stress "most of the time" (APA, 2023), and 35% report feeling anxious due to social media pressures (UNICEF, 2021).

It is no secret that this teenage period is the most crucial of their lives not just from the perspective of their mental health but also for their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and holistic well-being. However, the central question of this study is: 'Are Gen Z learners truly thriving in digital surroundings or merely surviving to adjust their sails in the storms of their lives?'

EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY GEN Z

Gen Z often finds themselves on the verge of nervous breakdown. Below are a few key indicators which show their vulnerability in dealing with contemporary circumstances.

1. Digital Overload—Gen Z students are habitual and familiar with constant notification pop-ups, information overload, multitasking, etc. They aren't a "demanding" but a "commanding" generation. Due to this persistent engagement in the digital arena, their communication skills, attention span, and health are affected. On top of it, mental fatigue is caused by FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) and social media comparison.
2. Academic and Social Pressure—Today's education system primarily focuses on getting grades, high-paying jobs, and elite career aspirations. To achieve this, today's students are expected, rather pressured, to develop all-round skills to remain relevant to society's needs. Expectations from parents, teachers, and peers add more pressure to already heightened emotional insecurity.
3. Psychological Effects—The amount of anxiety, stress, and burnout has become a common experience for Gen Z these days. They aren't sure about who they can confide in as their confidant. They aren't comfortable even with family members as they fear judgment, which shatters their confidence in themselves.

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NEED FOR LIFE SKILLS

Gen Z requires strong life skills to effectively handle emotional, educational, and online challenges. There are many life skills they need to learn to survive and thrive in today's dynamic times, which are mentioned below:-

1. Emotional Resilience—Gen Z needs to master the art of being emotionally mature and stable to cope with contemporary societal challenges. Studies show that students with high EI demonstrate 30–40% lower anxiety levels and stronger coping abilities.
2. Building Self-Awareness and Self-Management—Self-awareness is understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and stress triggers, which helps Gen Z recognize how digital and academic pressures affect them. Self-management is the ability to control emotions, manage time, limit distractions, and make healthy choices. Together, these skills help Gen Z stay focused, calm, and resilient in a fast-paced, tech-driven world.
3. Navigating Overwhelming Digital Information—Over half of Gen Z, about 58%, experience stress related to screen use, making responsible management of digital habits crucial. Maintaining digital wellness helps decrease distractions, lowers risks associated with online activities, and prevents emotional fatigue caused by excessive screen time. Practicing balance in digital routines supports better mental health and resilience in the digital age.
4. Adaptability, Creative Thinking, and Lifelong Learning Approaches—Adaptability helps Gen Z adjust to fast changes in technology and society, while creative thinking enables innovative problem solving. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), 44% of skills will change in the next 5 years, making adaptability essential.

ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Educational institutions play a crucial role in supporting Gen Z's emotional well-being. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights the importance of life skills education, promoting flexibility and holistic growth. Schools with Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs report a 27% increase in student mental health. Mindfulness programs can lower student stress by up to 38%. Additionally, counselling, peer support, and digital wellness training help students develop healthier habits. These initiatives foster confidence, resilience, and emotional stability among students. A few days ago, the National Task Force conducted an online survey of higher education institutions, asking all stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) to partake and discuss the well-being of students, particularly in higher education.

DISCUSSION

The aforementioned data indicates that Gen Z is both a technically equipped and emotionally vulnerable generation. The key difference between Gen Z thriving or merely surviving in a digital world lies in the management of time, resources, emotions, and thought patterns. They need to be understood, guided, supported, and mentored through their challenges. Gen Z has advanced earlier than previous generations. Thus, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders must make concentrated efforts to safeguard the mental, emotional, and social well-being of their "future" generation (i.e., Gen Z).

CONCLUSION

In today's highly digital world, Gen Z's emotional health is shaped by both digital advantages and psychological pressures. Rising rates of anxiety, loneliness, and academic stress show many are quietly struggling. Strengthening life skills, particularly in digital wellness, emotional intelligence, and resilience, is vital for helping Gen Z live balanced and fulfilling lives. Cooperation between educational institutions and families is essential to build supportive environments that enable this generation not only to cope but to truly flourish.

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TO MEME OR NOT TO MEME, THAT IS THE QUESTION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF TEACHING LAW TO THE GEN Z

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Abstract

This paper provides an autoethnographic exploration of teaching law to Gen Z learners, by focussing on how the use of memes, pop culture, and innovative pedagogies which incorporate collaborative learning have bridged the generational gap within the author's classrooms in a law school. The study draws from the author's experiences as a Millennial teacher at an institution that favours discussions and critical thinking over rote learning, allowing her to explore teaching methods that are inclusive of the students' learning preferences and attention patterns. The paper demonstrates how assigning readings that are relatable, using memes as interpretive tools, and setting assignments like 101 projects, that prioritise experiential learning have facilitated learning within the Gen Z classrooms, ensuring that complex legal formats become accessible and memorable through participative formats. The author also expounds how today's learners value dialogue and clarity over conventional forms of teaching by delivering lectures. The study also presents how these digital natives interact with the constant access to information which shapes not only their learning, but also their sociopolitical engagement. Ultimately, the paper makes the case for abandoning the myth that Gen Z does not want to learn. Instead, the author proposes that creativity, empathy and reflexivity on the part of the teachers aids in creating a collaborative learning space grounded in trust and shared curiosity, ensuring learning without prejudice.

Keywords: *Memes, pop culture, Gen Z learners, digital nativity, collaborative learning.*

INTRODUCTION

"To meme or not to meme, that is the question…"

This alteration of the Shakespearean quote aptly summarises the current teaching dilemmas in higher education institutions, where there is a constant struggle to maintain student attention while ensuring that learning outcomes are met. In today's world, it would be difficult to find a person who has not engaged with memes, especially if they have a smartphone and an internet connection. According to Kirby Conrod, a professor of linguistics at Swarthmore College, the concept of a meme can be explained as "a self-replicating chunk of information — by asking someone about an inside joke they had with friends or an advertising jingle that's been stuck in their head for 20 years" (Benveniste, 2022). Memes have a world of their own, where some members of the current generation choose to communicate exclusively through memes, offering a succinct, pictorial mode of expression that requires few words. At first glance, it appears to be a very unserious, non-academic way of expression, but this paper, employing an autoethnographic method of analysis, argues that the use of memes and pop culture in teaching can serve as a tool of communication and relatability, thereby bridging the ever-widening chasm between generations.

The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to make a case for using memes and other media as tools for teaching and learning; second, to present a more holistic picture of the current generation of young learners, specifically in higher education institutions teaching law; and third, to dispel the myth of the *uninterested learners*, a term widely used to describe Gen Z learners. The scope of this study is limited to the learning and teaching of law to Gen Z using the autoethnographic method, where my own experiences as a Millennial teacher will be used to analyse and reflect upon the learning methods and preferences of Gen Z. To supplement my observations and reflections, I have also conducted an informal survey as part of an anonymous feedback mechanism I employ every semester, where the students are able to provide their thoughts on the teaching methods, and the assignments. I have also used some quotes here to support my points, with the due permission of the students.

The autoethnographic method "uses personal experience ("auto") to describe and interpret ("graph") cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices ("ethno")" (Adams et al., 2017). The method accounts for the personal

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experiences, inclinations, social and political positions, while allowing the ethnographer to reflexively analyse their experiences, "to identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life" (Adams et al., 2017). There are primarily two reasons to use this method for this research: first, the lack of literature on teaching law to Gen Z, and its reception by the intended learners. The available literature on learning and development-based interventions includes behavioural analyses of Gen Z conducted within the context of general learning preferences and their attention spans. For example, (Pal et al., 2024), or (*Students 2024*, n.d.), or ('Generation Z', n.d.). Although relevant and very important, there are only rare academic interventions that analyse Gen Z's relationship with the current world socially, politically, economically, and legally. Using autoethnography enables me to reflect on my experiences with Gen Z, allowing these aspects to be discussed as they emerge within the curriculum itself. My positionality as an academic and teacher, specifically in the field of law, allows me to directly receive the reactions, opinions, and stances of my students, who are part of Gen Z.

The second reason for using this method is that my position as a Millennial law teacher is also relevant in the discussion, as my generational proximity puts me in a unique position of being able to access the language, thought processes, and preferences that Gen Z uses to learn, thus allowing me to facilitate discussions where students are able to put forth their ideas and are able to relate with my teaching methods. Considering this, autoethnography enables me to reflect on my own positionality, as I am a law teacher in a privileged institution with access to a mostly captive audience in the form of a classroom. Additionally, in these times, we are constantly recording and documenting our lives and the world around us. It is also imperative to document this ideological and methodical shift in learning and teaching methods academically, thereby preserving an archive of a constantly changing world.

CONTEXT FOR TEACHING WITH MEMES

The term "meme" was first coined by "the British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins… in his 1976 book, "The Selfish Gene."" (Benveniste, 2022). In its original conception, "a "meme" was analogous to a "phoneme," the smallest unit of sound in speech, or a "morpheme," the smallest meaningful subunit of a word" (Benveniste, 2022). Memes have become a way of introducing social commentary and sharing views and opinions, via media that "a piece of media that is repurposed to deliver a cultural, social or political expression, mainly through humor" (Benveniste, 2022). Thus, memes can also be an effective tool to teach, as memes have the power to both "depict and construct" meaning (Meyer, 2021). This power of expression is not limited to the law; it extends to any and every aspect of the world. For example, there are engineering-related memes (*Our Favorite Engineering Memes*, 2025), or memes in sociology ('Sociological Memes by Students', 2014), economics memes (*Top Memes All Economists Will Love*, n.d.), etc. There are memes on the general theme of teaching ('Memes for Teachers', 2014), and on the themes of being graduate students (Lebovitz, 2017). The possibilities are limitless, and imagination is the key. The use of memes has ensured relatability with students so far and has fostered a sense of openness to learning. One of my students has stated that seeing complex terminologies and theories, made into a meme template for all to consume, and perhaps learn from, showed the class that I was in tune with their world, thus bridging the gap between the student and instructor. This also makes for fun classes, with gamification of the topics, which is also encouraged by the Indian National Education Policy 2020 for the students' learning (*About National Education Policy | Government of India, Ministry of Education*, n.d.).

The teaching of law is extremely theoretical and requires slow and close reading, with a deep understanding of the concepts, to eventually apply them to real-life scenarios. Like many other professions, the practice of law carries high stakes, and a foundational understanding promises significant outcomes and rewards. In my classes, I have observed that the sooner students understand and live this, the more they are inclined to take in-class instruction and reading seriously. To facilitate this understanding, I engage students with memes, which are their mode of expression and a medium they use in their daily lives. Introducing them to law memes makes topics like writ jurisdiction, interpretation, substantive and legislative operation of law, judicial review, and the basic structure doctrine more palatable, inviting students to ask more questions about why and how the law operates. The students' familiarity with the memes and the reproductive nature of these snippets curate an experience that allows them to retain more information, with these memes serving as their flashcards during preparation. I would like to note here that memes are not proposed as a substitute for reading the text or for engaging in critical discussions in class. They are designed to provide students with a familiar format, helping them feel less alienated from the material due to its length, complex language, and highly technical concepts. Some examples of such memes are presented below in Figures 1-8.

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Figure 1: Writs in constitutional law

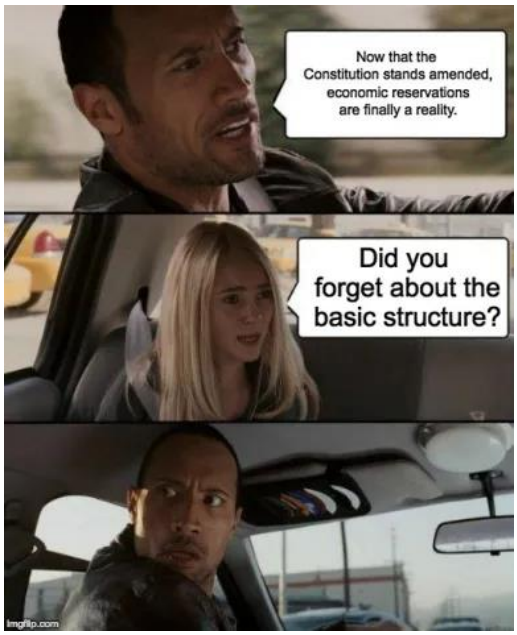

Figure 2: Operation of Basic Structure Doctrine

Figure 3: "Office meme" representing the concept of interpretation of statutes

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Figure 4: Meme depicting operation of Article 141
Figure 5: Depiction of Trespass to Property

Figure 6: Meme depicting how all laws made by the State must be pass the constitutional tests for testing their validity

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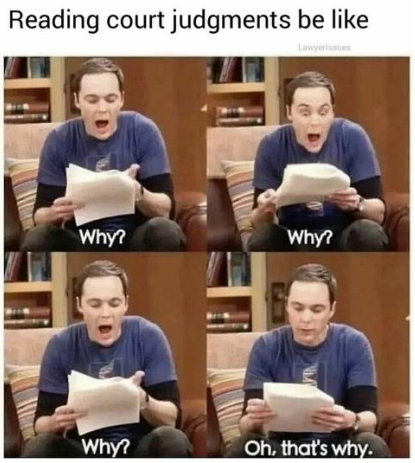

Figure 7: Big Bang Theory meme depicting lengthy case law language

Figure 8: Meme depicting one of the rules of interpretation

These mems have been all taken from stock images and are not created by me. These are just a few examples of the memes I have used to teach Constitutional Theory and Torts. These serve as teaching tools, where, after the concept is explained, they become a concise pictorial summary of the concept. To further this exercise, a colleague of mine undertook an internal assessment in which she required students to explain a topic using memes. This exercise, she states, allows her "to assess the student's understanding of the legal principles, and ability to apply them to pre-existing image templates (or fit them in boxes) that are not at all related to one another. In this way, students could put their creative thinking and legal knowledge to the test. The students' critical thinking skills were also tested because a lot of the memes were on takeaways from a case or dissenting opinion, etc."

To facilitate such understanding in my class, I engage students in several innovative internal assessments, such as client counselling, 101 projects, and parliamentary debates. Among these, client counselling and 101 projects are the most highly regarded assignments, as they enable students to be creative and apply their own learning methods to their presentations. Client counselling, as the name suggests, is a session where students meet with a "client" (usually a senior student) and are presented with a hypothetical scenario involving legal issues. They must then counsel the "client" on solutions, while the instructor observes and grades the interaction. This in-

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person, oral presentation of solutions orients the students to the high-stakes situations they will face in the real world, and the knowledge that this is just a simulation takes the pressure off. Students have responded positively to this model, reporting that it gives them confidence to participate in in-class written assessments, as they now have a clear understanding of what is expected of them when addressing legal issues. Client counselling also allows for real-time feedback from the instructor, thereby helping students understand the instructor's expectations.

Another assessment is the 101 projects, where students must prepare a 101 explainer of a module in their chosen format. The only brief given was that if a student has an exam tomorrow, they should be able to watch the presentation or read the explainer and successfully appear for the exam. The grading metrics for this assessment include conceptual clarity, readability and accessibility, as well as the comprehensiveness with which students have covered the topic. They are allowed to use any format of their choosing—I have received skits, podcasts, spoofs of cartoons (such as Dora the Defamer), pamphlet-style explainers, movies, regular presentations incorporating memes, songs inspired by rap songs, and a crossover skit featuring Bridgerton and Gossip Girl. These were thoroughly researched projects demonstrating a strong understanding of the foundational concepts of the subject. Like my colleague's experience, I also observed that these projects encourage a novel approach to critical thinking, where students not only engage with the subject, topic, and reading material but also apply their skills and existing knowledge to convey their understanding of the topic. These projects have also become a valuable repository of knowledge, as I have compiled an archive of them and made it accessible to all students. Such projects again imbibe a sense of ownership in the work they have produced, while allowing them to engage with the subject on their own terms, according to their preferences.

TEACHING LAW TO GEN Z: MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I currently teach law at Jindal Global Law School of O. P. Jindal Global University, located in Haryana, where classes are conducted using the Socratic method, encouraging active class participation, and internal assessments designed solely by the instructor. The instructor has complete autonomy within the classroom with respect to class plans, style and mode of instruction, with the requirement of fulfilling the learning outcomes and ensuring that the syllabus is adhered to and completed. This autonomy also allows instructors to use innovative teaching methods and engage in experiential learning through various modes of assignments.

My teaching is also conducted using interactive methods, where students are invited to reflect on the assigned readings, pose questions, and the classroom is a safe space for sharing their thoughts and opinions. I recognise that not all higher education institutions may be able to follow this model of teaching due to several reasons, and I would like to note that my reflections are limited to my engagement with the students at my university, primarily based on my interactions within the classroom.

My classes every semester start with laying down the classroom policies and reading the safe space pledge. Among the classroom policies, one that is notable is the 'no devices' policy in my class. I ensure that the class understands the necessity of this. Although most of the teaching material is available online and shared with the students in digital formats, there has been little resistance to the policy. My intention in this case is to give the students an opportunity to be completely present in class, and also to address the "short attention span" (Pal et al., 2024) attributed to them as a generation. An honest conversation about devices in the classroom and explaining why I do not feel safe when devices are used in class brings them to the same page and lets them see that I am willing to discuss matters with them, rather than imposing rules and restrictions. Such conversations also make them believe that they are adults whom I trust to be responsible, thus leading to a sense of collaboration, empathy, and trust within the classroom space. While creating this sense has always been important in all classrooms, it is rather imperative in the case of Gen Z, as their relationships with their surrounding world are facilitated through devices.

Furthermore, laying down the policy on the first day itself orients the students to how the semester will progress and demonstrates to them that their views and opinions are valued in the classroom. To quote a student reflecting on the past semester, "I believe [the professor] maintained a good balance between letting us think we're COLLEGE students and college STUDENTS at the same time. The difference being in [her] casually talking to us like we talk among ourselves, [but] also disciplining us when needed, so we don't lose our sense of still being students at the end of the day." The necessity of this trust and collaboration within the classroom will be explored in more detail in the subsequent sections of this paper.

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GEN Z: PERCEPTIONS AND LEARNING

Gen Z has so far been perceived as a generation with a short attention span, being distracted, people who do not adhere to workplace rules of conduct, especially regarding clothing and hierarchical structures, self-centred, risk-takers, and opinionated (Pal et al., 2024). This perception is well-founded and we, as instructors, can attest to this through our experiences. However, these perceptions have created a negative image of the students in the minds of the instructors. In my interactions with fellow teachers at the University, I have observed a sense of exasperation and helplessness when it comes to ensuring student engagement within the classroom, as well as with in-class lectures and assigned readings. Teachers have reported dull classroom sessions where students do not read and decidedly do not engage with the written material for a variety of reasons. In the law school, this has been observed mainly in humanities classes, where subjects such as sociology and jurisprudence, which are purely theoretical, require students to read lengthy texts with complex concepts. These classes require pre-class readings for students to grasp the concepts being tackled in class, which, my fellow teachers have reported, is no longer effective.

To address this issue, some of my colleagues and I held a classroom discussion and asked the students what they believed would work best for their learning. The benefits of an open dialogue were once again proven, as students reported feeling a sense of being othered and vilified in their learning methods. Students reported that they preferred more peer-to-peer learning and watching videos to understand a topic than just in-class instruction. They also stated that some neurodivergent students struggled with the in-class mode of instruction as they could not focus even if they wanted to, and as a result, remained uninterested in the material. In discussions with instructors, we observed that the teachers were more inclined to continue teaching with their own methods without checking in with the students and catering to their needs. The teachers continued to expect lengthy readings to be completed before class, and compelled class participation, without accounting for the students' preferences about speaking up in class.

Thus, some of us (instructors) decided to change our teaching methods by incorporating suggestions from students, such as requiring students to read the material only *after* it has been discussed in class once or implementing weekly online assignments that would provide students with real-time feedback on their own level of understanding. These assignments also help the teacher gauge where the students stand in terms of their learning and assess if any changes are required in the teaching mode/methods. At JGU, implementing these methods has been easy, as in addition to the classroom sessions, we are also advised to hold in-person office hours with students, where we meet with each student at least twice outside of the classroom to either solve doubts or just check in regarding the semester and the pace of teaching, etc. Through these interactions, it has become clear that the students are interested in learning and receiving feedback, but their learning methods and preferences differ a lot from those of their predecessors. It was also observed that their relationship with learning, specifically learning of the law, is also different. Gen Z does not respond to authoritative lectures; they respond to dialogue. They do not respond well to imposed policies but are very much willing to come to the table for a discussion and to find reasonable solutions. I would like to note here that I recognise that such dialogues and such interventions are not always possible, and structure cannot always be done away with when working within institutions. This, however, does not mean that structure cannot be made accommodating for the ever-changing needs of the generation.

An important part of teaching Gen Z, I have observed, is not so much about teaching as it is about creating an environment of study and work that appeals to them. Having in-class discussions, where the instructor also shares their concerns and limitations, allows students to humanise and view the teacher in a light that encourages them to trust the teacher. For example, my students have reported feeling seen and their concerns shared when I discuss the length of the cases and tell them that I, too, struggle with the length. Admitting that I do not know something also helps them not view me on a pedestal, and it helps me stay on the same level as them, thereby enhancing relatability. These surrounding, supposedly aesthetic practices, enhance the learning experience for students, especially Gen Z. Additionally, sharing your passions with the students and making cross-cultural, cross-modular connections also open up new avenues of teaching and learning.

My classes are interspersed with numerous pop-culture references, as I am an avid moviegoer and enjoy watching sitcoms and other series. Even the memes shared above include Bollywood references, which are from very famous movies that the students are very likely to have watched. Sharing this passion with the students usually results in them sharing their favourites, and the class becomes a place where we relate case law with movie plots, and students retain more information. For example, the topic of Defamation includes a case law regarding a businessman who is suspected of arms trading, which I relate to Ghafoor's character in the series "Ba****ds of Bollywood". And of course, SUITS, the legal drama where Harvey Specter is a hot-shot corporate lawyer in the city of New York. SUITS is almost a rite of passage for law students; everyone has either watched it or knows of it. As a result, relating concepts like vicarious liability to this series helps students relate to the topic

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instantly and retain the information. Students have reported that such examples make them retain the concepts from the subject and recall them during examinations. Thus, incorporating memes and Bollywood references into my teaching has proven to be a successful method for engaging these digital natives.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND DIGITAL NATIVITY

The current generation of learners has a unique relationship with the law. They do not view the law as an overbearing force in their lives, but rather as a tool for them to exercise their rights. They are also experiencing law through their devices, where they are not only exposed to the Indian law and the news, but also to international law. The world is truly at our fingertips now, and our access makes us part of the global discourse. Gen Z was born into this kind of technology and access. Their predecessors have experienced the transition from landlines to cordless phones, as the technology has evolved into smaller and more independent devices. AI has taken over our lives, but Gen Z was born with access to AI. Thus, AI and technology are their truth, just as telephones were for those who came before us. Those who have access to such information are bound to utilise it and make it work to their advantage.

Access to information from all around the world has also had an impact on the general culture of the generation, where students are no longer following traditional learning methods, observing traditional decorum and manners within a profession, and are only willing to respect and admire people who bring substantive knowledge to the table. During my interactions with the students while teaching them constitutional theory or jurisprudence, I have observed that the current generation seems to have a very peculiar relationship with the law. They view rights as truly their own, something the state must not grant, but protect as they inherently possess those rights. The current generation is redefining a multitude of practices, including the way they attend classes, address their teachers, and approach their subjects. Students are exposed to all the information in the world, and today, those who can, are adopting and choosing various methods of interacting with education. Their education model may be domestically restricted, but the information is not, and hence, students today are more than engaged in the global discourse of rights and citizenship (Gent et al., 2013). Today's students feel a shared responsibility to address global issues and humanitarian crises (Gent et al., 2013), and they intend to utilise their education and access to aid in this process.

The youth are using social media, AI, and other digital tools to hold governments accountable, share information, and participate in the politics of not only their own countries, but also those of other countries (*Gen Z Uprising in Asia Shows Social Media Is a Double-Edged Sword*, 2025). Gen Z has recently led national protests against injustices across Asia in Indonesia (Regalado et al., 2025), the Philippines (See, 2025), Bangladesh (*Bangladesh's Gen-Z Battles to Gain Political Ground after Ousting Hasina | Reuters*, n.d.), and most recently Nepal (Kathmandu et al., 2025). According to the New York Times, these protests by "economically frustrated, technologically expert, educationally overqualified—is part of a wellspring of youthful dissent that has flowed in recent years" (Kathmandu et al., 2025). The Nepal protests of 2025 were actually termed the Gen Z protests as the Nepalese youth utilised their digital access to mobilise and carry out a movement of uprising against corruption and nepotism (Kathmandu et al., 2025). India is also no stranger to the vehement political involvement of the youth within politics, which is only getting stronger with the use of social media, for example the most recent AQI protest in Delhi, where youngsters used social media to mobilise against the government to tackle rising pollution levels ('From Delhi's AQI Protest to Nepal's Gen Z Revolt, Outrage in the Age of Social Media Is a New Ball Game', 2025). My students have themselves participated in several on- and off-campus protests using social media as their tool for propagation of information.

Thus, we are witness to a generation that is redefining not only their own relationships with law and order or the government or institutional administrations, but they are also actively participating in the domestic and international politics, recognising a shared burden of global citizenship and digital nativity. We are seeing how the youth are redefining the features of democracy for themselves, recalling and revisiting history to learn from the wrongs, and building a connection with their land and country. And they are doing all this using memes too, for example, the memes during the Nepal unrest (*Indiatimes on Instagram*, 2025), ('When Gen Z Protests, the Revolution Is Hashtag-Ed, Meme-d, and Reel-Ed', 2025). The use of the "One Piece Jolly Roger Flag" during the Nepal protests also shows the conflation of the real and digital worlds, while demonstrating the global citizenship status of Gen Z where the entire generation is participating in protests, divided by borders and language, but united by the symbolism of the pop culture references and shared stories (Harvey, 2025).

TEACHER'S ROLE AND PARTICIPATION:

Based on the above information and my interactions with students at my university (OPJGU), and my alma mater (Modern Law College, affiliated to SPPU), both of which are highly different in their approach to education and teaching, their infrastructures, and syllabi, I have observed that this phenomenon of the shift in learning preferences of Gen Z is common across the board. This is specifically true for the law students. I have thus

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attempted to map the major concerns raised by students and instructors, and present here possible solutions or pathways for a better learning and teaching experience for both stakeholders.

One of the most common concerns raised by the teachers has been that students are passive in class, distracted, and not interested in the subject matter. Conversely, the students have stated that they feel the teachers are aggressive and dismissive and are unable to convey why they should study the topic. This is a unique situation where it seems that students are expecting instructors to almost justify their presence in the educational institution and explain why they should study a particular subject. However, there is more nuance to this matter. After reflecting on this concern with my peers and students, the students revealed that they prefer more engagement with the '*why*' of studying rather than just learning because the curriculum demands it. With access to the world's information at their fingertips, they seek to engage in meaningful discourse and are not interested in rote learning. Thus, instructors must bring to the classroom a discussion on why the subject matters and bring in their positionality with respect to the subject. One way would be to recognise and respect the alleged disinterest and engage with it in class or office hours to understand the needs of the respective cohorts. Here, the ethic of trust and collaboration goes a long way in inviting students to reflect on the reasons for learning something rather than just imposing a curriculum.

Another concern raised by the instructors was that students are highly critical in their thinking without having a foundational understanding of the subject matter. Adding to the issue is the use of AI to produce assignment essays and critical pieces without engaging with the assigned readings within the curriculum. This can again be addressed by a collaborative classroom space, where instructors take a piece of critique presented by the student and reverse-engineer the concept, rather than insisting upon linear learning. Such an approach, also known as non-linear learning, is useful for establishing an interdisciplinary understanding of concepts while engaging students' perspectives. We must remember that the current generation of students is born into a culture of critique. Thus, instructors must engage with that critique, and most importantly, explain the meaning and purpose of critique using the students' perspective. Using memes and new technology, addressing the use of AI and allowing its use in generating essays is an inevitable step at this stage. Instead of pushing back, instructors must incorporate the new methods of learning. For example, I demonstrate to my students how to provide relevant prompts to large language models to produce the required results and then engage in an in-class exercise of editing the product for conceptual clarity, using the reading material from the course. This plays an important role in letting the students understand that while they may outsource work to AI, they must not outsource their thinking. These exercises also motivate and inspire the students to engage with the subject matter on their own terms, facilitating their learning.

CONCLUSION

Having addressed some recommendations in the previous section, I would like to reiterate the point that, although the teaching of certain subjects requires a certain level of structure, we must not forget our position as learners while facilitating the learning of the new generations to come. We have also faced struggles where our concerns have not been addressed. The current generation is affording us the opportunity to rethink these ways and develop new methods of learning. To use memes or not may be a personal choice, but the requirement of innovation in teaching has not been clearer than today. When students start asking urgent questions, begin using novel technology, and start speaking a different language, we must come to the classroom with novel solutions, empathy, and respect, while holding ourselves accountable to explain the core of education—the point of learning at all.

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VARIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS ON NATIONAL LEVEL PLAYERS

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Abstract

16 PF Questionnaire constructed and standardized by Reymond B. Cattel whereas Self concept Questionnaire constructed and standardized by Rajkumar Saraswat "was administered on 50 female school game National level players of Gujarat. The objectives of the investigation were to compare the Personality traits and self-concept among Individual and Team game players. Statistical analysis has been done by T-test and the significance of the result was seen on 0.05 levels. The T-test showed that there was no significant difference found in mean differences among the individual and team game players in relation to Personality traits and Self-concept.

Keywords: *Comparative Study, Personality traits, Self-concept, Individual and Team Game players*

INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have been carried out on this topic in sports psychology. Most popular issues in sport Psychology concern the relationship between personality, self concept and sports participation. Certain personality traits and self concept are most important to achieve success in sports. Another popular belief is that certain Personality traits and self concept can be developed or modified through sports participation. Both of these issues have been extensively investigated over the last three decades.

Cattel Postulated that human behavior is a result of Interaction between external situations and individual traits. He has further divided personality traits into three categories on the basis of qualities of personality, temperamental traits (being persistently irritable, easy going or bold), ability traits (such as intelligence and skill, while dealing complex situation), and dynamic traits (such as motivation, interest and attitude). He further subs divided traits into attitudes, sentiments and Urges. Out of different inventories of assessing personality traits, Researcher has preferred 16 PF of Raymond B. Cattel.

Self concept is learned by an individual inference from his unique experiences. The individual perception of others toward him strongly influences his self image. In turn, self concept is a highly complex component of behavior, composed of both cognitive and effective dimension and has at least four orientations: The real self, the perceived self, and the ideas self and the self as perceived by others. Self concept may prove the most by others. Self concept may prove the most powerful motivation for specific behavior. Out of different inventories of assessing. Self concept, Researcher has preferred self concept Questionnaire (SCQ) by Dr. Raj kumar Saraswat.

The study has it's significances like the study would help to prepare and modify psychological training programmers according to the personality traits and self concept of the players. The present study would help teachers of physical education and coaches to motivate players according to their personality traits and self concept. The knowledge of the personality traits and self concept would help the coaches to handle the players of team and individual sports better way. The study would provide valuable literature in sports psychology and physical education. The findings of study would indicate whether specific personality and self concept characteristics motivate and sustain the interest in learning and succeeding in the individual and team games. It may help to promotion of sports coaching and educational efforts. Thus, the present research will prove useful in the field of sports and games.

METHODS

HYPOTHESIS: - It was hypothesized that there shall not be any significant differences between means of personality traits and self-concept among the individual and team games players at school Game National level.

SAMPLE: - For the purpose of the study fifty female players of Gujarat state, school games National participant players in the academic years 2023-24, individual sports like Athletics, Table-Tennis, Badminton, Lawn Tennis and Gymnastics and team games like Volleyball, Handball, Softball, Kho-kho and kabaddi. The samples were further divided into two groups namely individual and team games based on their participation at National school games as their sports. The average age of the subjects was between 16 to 19 years.

Cattle's 16 PF Questionnaire was used as a tool to collect data on personality factors of individual and team games players of school games National level participants of Gujarat state. The calculation of the

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questionnaire was based on the two scoring keys. With the help of these scoring keys the researcher got the raw scores and then stens score, according to the instructions given in the manual.

Dr. Raj kumar Saraswat's self concept Questionnaire (SCQ) was used as a tool to collect data on self concept of individual and team games player of school games National level participants of Gujarat state. The calculation of the questionnaire was based on five alternatives to give his responses ranging most acceptable to least acceptable description of this self concept. With the help of this scoring key the researcher got the raw scores, according to the instructions given in the manual.

To compare the personality traits and self concept among individual and team games players, mean, standard deviation and uncorrelated t-test was applied. The level of significance was set at 0.05 levels.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The t-test showed that there was no significant differences were found in mean differences among the individual and team games in relation to personality traits, i.e. Factor A (Reserved v/s Outgoing), Factor B (Less Intelligent v/s More Intelligent), Factor C (Affected by feeling v/s Emotionally stable,) Factor E (Humble v/s Aggressive), Factor F (Sober v/s Happy-go-lucky), Factor G (Expedient v/s Conscientious), Factor H (Shy v/s Venturesome), Factor I (Tough minded v/s Tender minded), Factor L (Trusting v/s Mistrusting), Factor M (Practical v/s Imaginative), Factor N (Unsophisticated v/s Calculating), and Factor Q3 (Indiscipline v/s Strong in own emotions) as 't' value was not found to be significant (0.953), (0), (0.133), (0.185), (0.538), (1.121), (0.130), (1.521), (1.342), (1.782), (0.849), (1.261) & (1.592) whereas required value was (2.021) at 0.05 level of significance.

Moreover, there was significant difference in case of personality traits i.e. Factor O (Placid v/s Apprehensive), Factor Q1 (Conservative v/s Experimenting), Factor Q2 (Group dependent v/s Self sufficient), Factor Q4 (Relaxed v/s Tensed) among the individual and team games as 't' value was found to be significant (2.967), (2.098), (3.275) and (2.956).

Table – 1
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE OF MEAN SCORES ON PERSONALITY TRAITS OF FACTOR 'A' TO 'Q4' AMONG THE INDIVIDUAL & TEAM GAMES PLAYERS

Factor	Group Compared	Significant "t" (0.05)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	"t" Ratio
A	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	4.64 4.64	1.29 0.848	0	0
B	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	3.76 4.00	1.44 1.095	0.24	0.133
C	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	4.56 4.60	0.897 0.632	0.04	0.185
E	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	4.68 4.80	0.881 0.692	0.12	0.538
F	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	4.52 4.76	1.024 0.818	0.24	1.121
G	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	5.20 5.40	1.058 0.894	0.2	0.731
H	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	4.80 5.36	1.46 1.13	0.56	1.521
I	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	4.92 5.48	1.57 1.38	0.56	1.342
L	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	5.24 5.60	0.75 0.692	0.36	1.782
M	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	5.04 5.56	2.32 2.00	0.52	0.849
N	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	5.0 5.56	1.35 1.17	0.56	1.261
O	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	4.48 5.48	1.62 0.50	1.00	2.967 *
Q1	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	5.20 5.88	1.13 1.17	0.68	2.098 *
Q2	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	4.80 6.12	1.44 1.43	1.32	3.275 *
Q3	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	6.48 7.12	1.44 1.42	0.64	1.592

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Q4	Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	5.48 6.16	0.854 0.787	0.68	2.956 *

The t-test showed that there was no significant difference was found in mean differences among the individual and team games in relation to self concept as "t" value was not found to be significant (0.953) whereas required value was (2.021) at 0.05 level of significance.

Table - 2
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE OF MEAN SCORES OF SELF CONCEPTS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM GAMES PLAYERS

Group Compared	Significant "t" (0.05)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	"t" Ratio
Individual Games Team Games	2.021 2.021	167.7 163.6	12.07 17.95	4.12	0.953

CONCLUSIONS

Within the limitations of the present study, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Whereas no significant difference was found in personality traits i.e. Factor A (Reserved v/s Outgoing), Factor B (Less Intelligent v/s More Intelligent), Factor C (Affected by feeling v/s Emotionally stable), Factor E (Humble v/s Aggressive), Factor F (Sober v/s Happy-go-lucky), Factor G (Expedient v/s. Conscientious), Factor H (Shy v/s Venturesome), Factor I (Tough minded v/s Tender minded), Factor L (Trusting v/s Mistrusting), Factor M (Practical v/s Imaginative), Factor N (Unsophisticated v/s Calculating) and Factor Q3 (Indiscipline v/s Strong in own emotions) among individual and team games players.
2. Whereas significant difference was found in personality trait i.e. Factor O (Placid v/s Apprehensive), Factor Q1 (Conservative v/s Experimenting), Factor Q2 (Group dependent v/s Self sufficient), Factor Q4 (Relaxed v/s Tensed) among individual and team games players.
3. In relation to self concept, no significant difference was found in Individual and team games players.

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELF CONCEPT & MENTAL TOUGHNESS ON SELECTED MALE & FEMALE VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS OF GUJARAT

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Abstract

Self concept questionnaire constructed and standardized by Rajkumar Saraswat whereas Mental toughness questionnaire constructed and standardized by Tiwari, Sharma and Jyoti were administered on 100 volleyball Players (50 male & 50 female) of Gujarat. The age of subjects ranged between 19 to 26 years. The objectives of the study were to assess and compare the Self concept & Mental Toughness among male and female Volleyball players of Gujarat. Statistical analysis has been done by t-test and the significance of the result was seen on 0.05 levels. The t-test showed that there was significant difference found in the sub-variables of self confidence, attention control and attitude control between male & Female Volleyball Players. There was no significant difference were found in the self concept & sub-variable of motivation control, goal setting and visual and imagery and total mental toughness score.

Keywords: *Self Concept, Mental Toughness, Motivation, Attention, Goal Setting, Male & Female volleyball players.*

INTRODUCTION

- Certain Self Concept & Mental Toughness are the most important to achieve success in sports.
- Self concept is learned by an individual inference from his unique experiences. The individual perception of other towards him strongly influences his self image.
- Self concept is highly complex component of behavior, composed of both cognitive and effective dimensions.
- Self concept has at least four orientations: The real self, the perceived self, the ideal self and the self as perceived by others.
- Mental toughness is the ability to consistently sustain one's ideal performance state during competition. The ultimate measure of mental toughness is consistency.
- The use of thinking skills, imagery, confidence building and other skills described later can be powerful techniques in reaching a high level of mental toughness.
- Most number of sports psychologists recognizes the fact that attention is multi-dimensional construct. By being mentally though, you can bring your talent and skill to light consistently.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A comparative study of self Concept & Mental Toughness on selected male & female volleyball players of Gujarat.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were to compare & find the differences among Male & Female Volleyball players of Gujarat in context of self concept, self confidence, Motivation control, Attention control, Goal setting, Attitude control, Visual and imagery.

SAMPLE

A total number of one hundred (n=100) subjects belonging to age ranging 19-26 years were selected. 50 male volleyball players and 50 female volleyball players of Gujarat were selected as a subject during the coaching camp at Nadiad for the said study.

METHODOLOGY

- The data was collected from Selected 50 male volleyball players and 50 female volleyball players of Gujarat.
- The self concept questionnaire constructed and developed by Rajkumar Saraswat as well Tiwari, Sharma and Jyoti's mental toughness questionnaire was used as a tool to collect the data on mental

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toughness were employed to collect the data from the subjects.

- All the necessary instructions were given to the subjects before the subjects were requested to respond the statement in the questionnaire.
- The calculation of the questionnaire was based on five alternatives to give their responses ranging most acceptable to least acceptable description of the self concept.
- Whereas, the questionnaire was based on five alternatives to give responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree description of the mental toughness.
- With the help of the scoring keys the researcher collects the raw scores, according to the instructions given in the manual.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data were analyzed statistically computing Mean, S.D. and t-ratio to find out significant difference if any between two experienced groups on the psychological parameter considered for the study. The results have been depicted in the following table.

TABLE - 1
SIGNIFICANCE DIFFERENCES OF MEAN SCORE AT SELF CONCEPT AMONG MALE & FEMALE VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS OF GUJARAT.

Variable	Group Compared	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significant "t" (0.05)	"t" Ratio
Self Concept	Male	16.6	2.75	2.04	0.22
	Female	18.2	4.14		

*Significant at 0.05 level.

The t-test showed that there was no significant difference in the “t” value exists between male and female volleyball players on self concept. As the calculated "t" (0.22) value is much lower than the tabulated "t" value (2.04) at 0.05 levels.

TABLE-2
SIGNIFICANCE DIFFERENCES OF MEAN SCORES AT VARIOUS TOOLS OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS AMONG MALE & FEMALE VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS OF GUJARAT.

Variables	Group Compared	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significant "t" (0.05)	"t" Ratio
Attention Control	MALE	37.420	4.233	2.118*	0.037
	FEMALE	35.380	5.333		
Motivation Control	MALE	34.260	5.286	0.186	0.853
	FEMALE	34.460	5.489		
Attitude Control	MALE	23.180	2.327	2.114*	0.037
	FEMALE	21.840	3.829		
Self Confidence	MALE	28.940	2.895	2.375*	0.019
	FEMALE	27.360	3.707		
Goal Setting	MALE	31.820	3.915	1.565	0.121
	FEMALE	30.560	4.131		
Visual and Imagery	MALE	23.760	3.047	0.906	0.367
	FEMALE	27.620	3.245		
Total Mental Toughness	MALE	176.540	21.208	0.769	0.444
	FEMALE	173.500	18.225		

* Significant at 0.05 level

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The t-test showed that there was significant difference in the "t" value between the elite sportsmen and the beginners on sub variables of Attention control, Attitude control and self confidence. Whereas no-significant difference was found in Motivation control, Goal setting, Visual and Imagery and Total Mental toughness score among male and female volleyball players of Gujarat

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Within the limitation of the study the following conclusions may be drawn.

(1) In relation to self concept, the t-test showed that there was no significant difference in the "t" value exists between male and female volleyball players of Gujarat.

(2) Whereas, significant difference found in the sub variable of mental toughness of Attention control, Attitude control and self-confidence scores among the Male & Female Volleyball players.

(3) But no significant difference found in Motivation control, Goal setting, Visual and imagery and Total Mental toughness score among the Male & Female Volleyball players.

(4) The total mental toughness is conceded the mean scores of mental toughness of Male Volleyball players of Gujarat were found to be more than the Female Volleyball players.

The Male Volleyball players have reflected better scores in self confidence, attention control and attitude control may be attributed to the fact that Male Volleyball players participate in various levels of competitions as well as a greater number of competition participation at various situations whereas, such situations are limited in the Female Volleyball players of Gujarat.

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