

GENERATION AS CULTURAL IDENTITY: THE DYNAMICS OF HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE IN THE FORMATION OF A SOCIETY'S SOCIAL CHARACTER

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ABSTRACT

A generation is understood not only as an age category, but also as a cultural identity shaped by the social and historical experiences collectively shared by individuals over a specific period of time. This article aims to analyze how the dynamics of historical experiences play a role in shaping the social character and value systems of each generation in society. This study employs a qualitative approach through a literature review of various sociological studies on the concept of generation and social change. The findings indicate that historical events, technological developments, and social and cultural changes influence a generation's mindset, value orientation, and lifestyle. Each generation subsequently develops distinctive social characteristics in response to the context of its time. In contemporary society, the acceleration of globalization and digitalization further strengthens the process of generational identity formation through increasingly widespread social interactions. Therefore, understanding generations as cultural identities is crucial for examining the dynamics of social change and intergenerational relationships in modern society.

Keywords: generation; cultural identity; historical experience; social change.

INTRODUCTION

Social change in modern society cannot be separated from the intergenerational dynamics that develop within different historical contexts. In sociological studies, a generation is understood not only as a group of individuals born within a specific time frame, but also as a social group shaped by relatively similar historical experiences and social conditions. These experiences encompass various social changes, technological developments, and cultural dynamics shared during an individual's formative years. These shared experiences subsequently shape the distinctive mindset, values, and social orientation of a generation, thereby distinguishing it from other generations (Moreno & Urraco, 2018).

Along with the development of contemporary society, the interpretation of generations has also expanded. Generations are no longer viewed merely as age categories but as cultural categories possessing distinct values, ways of thinking, and lifestyles. Each generation grows up in different social, economic, political, and technological contexts, so the social experiences they undergo help shape a unique cultural identity. From a cultural sociology perspective, these differences in historical context make generations social constructs with specific cultural characteristics (Christiani & Ikasari, 2020).

Furthermore, various studies indicate that differences in social experiences across generations can influence how individuals interpret cultural values and norms within society. These differences are evident in various aspects of social life, such as perceptions of beauty standards, lifestyles, and cultural preferences. For instance, there are differences in how older and younger generations interpret beauty standards within a particular society. This phenomenon demonstrates that cultural values and norms are dynamic and undergo changes in tandem with the progression of time and the social experiences that shape each generation (Kamilia & Syafrini, 2025).

In addition to influencing how cultural values are interpreted, generational differences are also reflected in patterns of communication and daily social interactions. Advances in communication technology also influence how individuals express themselves, build social relationships, and interact within society. Various studies indicate variations in communication styles between younger generations and previous ones, which are linked to changes in communication media and the development of digital technology. Thus, the communication patterns that emerge within a generation can reflect the cultural changes occurring in society (Christiani & Ikasari, 2020).

On the other hand, the shift in the younger generation's mindset toward traditional culture is also closely tied to the influence of technological advancements and the tide of globalization. Exposure to digital media and interaction with global culture are shaping new perspectives on local values that were previously passed down through generations. Generations born and raised in a digital environment tend to have different social experiences compared to previous generations, as the formation of their character and social values occurs through intense interaction with technology and the global flow of information (Fitri et al., 2025).

Based on this discussion, it can be understood that each generational group from the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), Generation Z, to Generation Alpha possesses cultural characteristics influenced by the social conditions and historical developments of their respective eras. Differences in historical experiences, technological advancements, and the accompanying cultural dynamics shape distinct patterns of thought, values, and modes of interaction across generations. Therefore, studies on generations as cultural categories are important for understanding the dynamics of changes in social values, communication patterns, and the formation of social identity within society. Based on this, this article aims to explore the differences in characteristics between generations and analyze the social, cultural, and technological factors that influence the development of each generation. Therefore, studies of generations as cultural categories are essential for understanding the dynamics of changing social values, communication patterns, and the formation of social identity within society. Based on this, this article aims to explore the differences in characteristics across generations and analyze the social, cultural, and technological factors that influence the development of each generation in contemporary society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method in the form of a literature review. The objective of this study is to describe and explain the findings derived from various journal articles relevant to the research topic. A qualitative method was chosen because this study focuses on a deep understanding of a phenomenon, rather than on numbers or statistical calculations. A descriptive-

analytical approach was employed by collecting various sources such as journals, books, and other scientific references, which were then analyzed comprehensively and reflectively.

This literature review is based on the premise that knowledge continues to evolve with the changing times. Therefore, the literature review is conducted to broaden the researcher's understanding of the discussed topic, as well as to assist in formulating the research problem, determining the theories to be used, and selecting appropriate methods. In the process, the researcher searches for and reviews various theoretical references relevant to the problem being studied. Thus, this literature review serves as the primary foundation of the research, both as a theoretical basis and as a reference for analyzing the data obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Experiences and the Formation of Generational Cultural Identity

Etymologically, the term "generation" derives from the Latin word *generatio*, which refers to the meaning of "birth" or "descent." In the development of social science studies, the concept of a generation is no longer understood merely as a grouping based on year of birth or a specific age range, but also as a social construct formed through historical and social experiences shared by a group of individuals within a specific period of time. These shared experiences subsequently shape patterns of thought, value orientations, and the way individuals perceive the social reality around them. Thus, a generation possesses not only a demographic dimension but also social and cultural dimensions related to the formation of collective identity within society. This perspective aligns with the ideas of Karl Mannheim, who explained that a generation is formed through shared social experiences within a specific historical context. Individuals who grow up during the same historical period tend to experience relatively similar social, political, and cultural events, thereby forming a collective consciousness that influences how they understand social reality. These shared experiences then give rise to distinctive patterns of values, perspectives, and behavioral orientations within a generational group, such that a generation is understood not only as a biological category based on age, but also as a social group formed through historical processes that shape a shared consciousness and identity (Afifah et al., 2025).

In contemporary sociological studies, the concept of a generation is increasingly understood as a social phenomenon influenced by the dynamics of societal change. Technological advancements, economic transformations, and political shifts during a specific period can shape a generation's character and perspective on social reality. Research indicates that generations raised in the digital age exhibit distinct patterns of social interaction, methods of information acquisition, and approaches to identity formation compared to previous generations. This indicates that social experiences during a specific historical period can produce distinctive generational characteristics in line with the context of the era (Syawaludin, 2024). In modern society, the concept of generation is also increasingly linked to the formation of cultural identity, as collectively experienced social experiences often influence cultural preferences, lifestyles, and the ways in which individuals express social values in their daily lives.

These differences in historical experiences can be observed in the characteristics of various generational groups within society. The Baby Boomer generation (born around 1946–1964) grew up in relatively stable social conditions prior to the widespread development of digital technology. The socialization process, which took place within a still-conventional social environment, shaped patterns of interaction that were more direct, structured, and grounded in real-life experiences. Values such as discipline, loyalty, and formal, hierarchical social relationships became prominent characteristics of this generation (Fitri et al., 2024). Furthermore, Generation X (born around 1965–1980) grew up during a period marked by various social and economic changes, including the dynamics of the global economic crisis, shifts in family structure, and the early development of information technology. These conditions shaped a generation that is more independent, adaptive, and realistic in facing social change (Nurhuda, 2021; Cahyono et al., 2024).

Technological advancements and globalization have increasingly shaped the character of the next generation. Generation Y, or millennials (born around 1981–1996), grew up in an era of globalization and the rise of the internet, which expanded access to information and social networks. This has fostered communication patterns that are more open, fast-paced, and globally connected. Values such as openness to change, collaboration, and the pursuit of a balance between work and personal life are characteristics commonly found in this generation. Furthermore, Generation Z (born around 1997–2012) is a generation that has grown up from the very beginning in a highly integrated

digital environment. Their lives are characterized by the use of mobile devices, social media, and the rapid, borderless flow of global information. These conditions have shaped communication patterns that are more visual and interactive, making social media a crucial space for building personal identity and expressing views on various social issues (Ramadhani, 2025; Kurniawaty, 2024). An even younger generation, Generation Alpha (born after 2010), is growing up in a society that is fully connected to digital technology and global networks. From an early age, they have been accustomed to using digital devices in various activities, making technology an integral part of their social experiences (Hale, 2022).

The shared social experiences of a generation do not stop at historical events alone, but gradually evolve into distinctive values, customs, and behavioral patterns. In the sociological study of generations, generational identity is understood as the result of a long social process in which life experiences during a specific historical period are internalized into a system of values and cultural practices in everyday life (Putra, 2016). This process of generational identity formation occurs through various social institutions, such as the family, education, the media, and the social environment. The family serves as the initial setting where individuals come to know values, norms, and patterns of social relationships through parenting styles and communication in daily life. Educational institutions then reinforce this process by fostering attitudes, discipline, and the ability to cooperate within a broader social environment. The development of the media also exerts a significant influence on shaping generational identity, as the media serves not only as a source of information but also shapes cultural tastes, lifestyles, and how individuals perceive various social issues. Meanwhile, social environments such as peers and communities further reinforce the process of generational identity formation through shared social interactions and experiences.

Through the interplay of these various factors, the shared life experiences of a generation eventually evolve into distinctive cultural traits that are evident in various aspects of life, such as ways of thinking, cultural preferences, communication styles, and consumption patterns. Generations that grow up in the digital age, for example, tend to access information more quickly, are more open to global cultural influences, and are more accustomed to consuming content through digital media than through conventional media. Thus, a generation can be understood as a social phenomenon formed through shared historical experiences that subsequently develop into a cultural identity distinguishing the character of a social group from that of other generations.

The Dynamics of Social Character and the Role of Generations in Cultural Change

Generational differences mean that each group possesses distinct social characteristics because they grow up in different social, cultural, and technological conditions. This is evident in communication styles, where older generations tend to use direct and more formal communication, while Millennials and Generation Z are more accustomed to fast-paced, casual digital communication via social media or chat (Lestari & Yulianita, 2025). The widespread use of technology has also influenced patterns of social interaction, with face-to-face communication decreasing and interactions tending to be shorter and less meaningful as they increasingly take place online (Fuad et al., 2021).

Additionally, differences in social character are evident in how people view life and behave within social environments. Changes in lifestyle, interaction patterns, and the ways individuals express themselves indicate a shift in social values across generations, influenced by the progression of time and differing social environments (Maulidina & Ridho, 2020). Younger generations tend to be more flexible, adaptive, and open to change, while previous generations place greater emphasis on stability and order. These differences give rise to a generational gap, evident in differing ways of thinking, communicating, and addressing issues—which, under certain conditions, can trigger conflict if mutual understanding is lacking (Lestari & Yulianita, 2025). Nevertheless, these differences do not always have a negative impact, as they can also serve as a form of social adaptation, where each generation complements the other—for example, the older generation with their experience and the younger generation with their innovation and use of technology. Thus, these differences in social character actually become part of the dynamics of change within society.

The younger generation plays a crucial role as agents of change in society, particularly amid the rapid advancement of digital technology. These changes not only impact technical aspects but also transform patterns of interaction, values, and culture in social life. The presence of digital technologies, such as the internet and social media, has driven a shift from face-to-face communication to digital-based communication, thereby influencing how individuals build social

relationships and understand the reality around them (Fuad et al., 2021). This indicates that cultural change cannot be separated from the generation's experience in using technology in their daily lives.

Furthermore, Millennials and Generation Z are known as groups that are more adaptable to technology and tend to be open to change, making them frequent key drivers in the process of cultural transformation (Visye et al., 2025).

Their ability to leverage technology not only simplifies daily activities but also fosters a more flexible, agile, and dynamic mindset. Consequently, societal culture undergoes a transformation, including shifts in communication styles, work methods, and how individuals express themselves in digital spaces. On the other hand, these cultural changes also give rise to new dynamics within society, particularly when different generations exhibit varying levels of adaptability to technology. These differences can influence organizational culture, interaction patterns, and perspectives on change itself. However, technological development can also serve as a unifying factor across generations, as it drives adaptation and adjustment within social environments (Kasih, 2023). Thus, generations are not merely the result of cultural change but also play an active role in shaping and directing that cultural change within society.

Understanding generational dynamics is a crucial step in interpreting the social changes occurring within society. Generations do not merely denote age differences but also reflect differences in historical experiences, values, and perspectives shaped by specific social contexts. These differences ultimately shape patterns of social interaction and the direction of cultural development within society.

In sociological studies, a generation is understood as a group of individuals who share common historical and social experiences, thereby forming specific collective characteristics (Lase & Daeli, 2020). These shared experiences influence how individuals perceive the world, interact with others, and respond to social change. Therefore, understanding generations means understanding how past experiences shape current social conditions. Furthermore, generational differences often give rise to gaps in values, attitudes, and behaviors. These gaps emerge due to differences in experiences, habits, and ways of thinking across generations (Lase & Daeli, 2020). If not properly understood, these differences can lead to stereotypes, conflicts, and even a weakening of social cohesion within society. Conversely, however, if managed effectively, generational differences can actually become a source of strength through the exchange of knowledge, values, and experiences. In the context of modern society, technological change and globalization are further accelerating the differences between generations. For instance, generations raised in the digital age possess communication styles, ways of thinking, and access to information that are vastly different from those of previous generations. Social media, for example, serves not only as a communication tool but also as a means of identity formation and the dissemination of cultural values among the younger generation (Assidiq et al., 2023). This demonstrates that generational dynamics are closely intertwined with shifts in social and cultural structures within society.

On the other hand, intergenerational interaction is key to maintaining social balance. Intergenerational learning can serve as a means to bridge differences, strengthen social cohesion, and foster a more inclusive understanding within society (Lase & Daeli, 2020). Through these interactions, older generations can pass on values and experiences, while younger generations can bring innovation and new perspectives. Furthermore, in this era of globalization and modernization, the relationships between people, society, and culture are undergoing significant changes. Technological advancements and the rapid flow of information not only alter patterns of social interaction but also shape new values and norms within society (Hapsah et al., 2024). In this context, generations play a crucial role in the process of social adaptation and cultural transformation.

Thus, understanding generations is not merely about recognizing differences between age groups but also about comprehending the broader process of social change. Generations are part of an ongoing process in the cultural development of society, where each generation serves as both a custodian and a renewer of social values. Therefore, studies on generations are key to understanding the evolving dynamics of society over time.

CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion in this article, it is clear that generations cannot be viewed merely as a matter of age. Rather, a generation is the result of shared historical, social, and cultural experiences during a specific period. These experiences then shape the distinctive ways of thinking, values, and social characteristics of each generation. Differences in the context of the times, whether in terms of social

conditions, technological advancements, or the flow of globalization cause each generation to develop distinct perspectives. This is evident in various aspects of daily life, such as communication styles, the use of technology, and attitudes toward work and social relationships. These differences are actually natural, as each generation is indeed shaped by distinct circumstances. In today's modern era, the development of digital technology and the rapid flow of information further reinforce the differences between generations. Generations raised in the digital age tend to be more open-minded, quick, and adaptable to change, while previous generations have more conventional and structured experiences. This situation not only highlights these differences but also demonstrates how social change occurs continuously through generational transitions. On the other hand, the younger generation plays a significant role as agents of change in society. They not only keep pace with the times but also help shape them, particularly through the use of technology and digital media. Changes in communication patterns, lifestyles, and even ways of self-expression in social spaces demonstrate that the younger generation directly contributes to the cultural transformation currently taking place. Nevertheless, generational differences can also create a gap, especially if not accompanied by mutual understanding. Differences in ways of thinking, values, and habits sometimes trigger misunderstandings or even conflicts. However, viewed from another perspective, these differences can actually become a strength. Through open interaction and communication, each generation can complement one another older generations with their experience and values, and the younger generation with their innovation and fresh perspectives. Therefore, understanding generations is key to understanding the dynamics of society as a whole. Generations are not merely part of social change; they are also the primary drivers of that process. Each generation not only inherits values from the past but also processes, adapts, and even transforms them to meet the needs of its time. From this, it is evident that social and cultural change is an ongoing process, and generations play a vital role in both maintaining continuity and bringing renewal to society.

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