Understanding the Emerging Expectations: A Qualitative Exploration of Challenges in Engaging Generation Z Clients

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Abstract— This qualitative study, using a phenomenological approach and an exploratory case study design, investigated the challenges professionals face when engaging Generation Z clients and their evolving expectations and behaviors within government offices in La Trinidad, Philippines. Through semi-structured interviews with professionals regularly interacting with Gen Z, the research aimed to deeply understand these lived experiences where formal protocols often clashed with digital-native preferences. Findings revealed three primary challenges: significant communication and interpersonal style gaps due to Gen Z's preference for rapid, visual, and informal digital exchanges, often leading to a "digital gap"; managing Gen Z's high expectations for authenticity and responsiveness, sometimes perceived as entitlement or impatience; and addressing the emotional and cognitive impacts of Gen Z's digital upbringing, including heightened sensitivities, vulnerability to misinformation, and perceived overconfidence or shorter attention spans. In response, professionals demonstrated substantial adaptation efforts, embracing digital transformation for responsive and authentic engagement and evolving their roles to be more approachable, empathetic listeners, counselors, and flexible educators. The study concludes that professionals are actively learning and adapting to effectively bridge generational divides, underscoring the critical need for targeted professional development in digital communication, interpersonal skills, mental health awareness, and adaptive leadership. These insights are vital for enhancing service delivery, guiding policy, and fostering intergenerational cooperation within public service and other sectors in the Philippine context.

Keywords— Communication Challenges, Digital Transformation, Generation Z, Professional Engagement, Qualitative Research.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the first generation to mature entirely in the digital age, Generation Z (Gen Z) exhibits a natural ease with technology and a global outlook, largely shaped by significant world events and pervasive digital interconnectedness [11]. This upbringing has fostered strong connections across diverse backgrounds and ethnicities. Studies across Europe, Asia, and North America consistently show Gen Z's high regard for authenticity, transparency, and social responsibility [33, 44]. They tend to favor brands aligning with their personal convictions, particularly concerning environmental sustainability, social justice, and ethical business practices, often researching a company's commitment to corporate social responsibility before making purchases [13, 16].

A significant global challenge for businesses and offices involves adapting to Gen Z's unique communication preferences and their high expectations for seamless digital experiences. Their constant exposure to instant connectivity means they anticipate quick, intuitive online interactions, preferring digital channels and prompt

responses [12, 25]. Research, including a study on Gen Z's YouTube engagement, indicates their proactive use of online company accounts before using services, highlighting a global trend toward digital information gathering and brand interaction [48]. Furthermore, their preference for visual content, especially short-form videos, and engagement with social media influencers significantly shape their perceptions and purchasing decisions in international markets [23, 45].

In the Philippines, Gen Z constitutes a substantial and growing demographic, with approximately 41 million individuals born between 1996 and 2010, representing about 38% of the total population (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020 [40]). This large troop is rapidly influencing market trends, particularly in e-commerce, and their distinct characteristics present both opportunities and challenges for businesses and service providers [40]. Filipino Gen Z consumers and clients specifically prioritize authenticity and transparency from brands, quickly rejecting dishonest marketing and disengaging from brands that don't align with their beliefs [33, 44]. They are notably values-driven and socially conscious, often prioritizing sustainability and ethical practices, and expect brands to reflect their commitment to social responsibility and diversity [13, 16].

Despite their digital proficiency, professionals in the Philippines face several challenges when engaging Gen Z. Their short attention spans require highly engaging and interactive content [7]. Filipino Gen Z are also adept at avoiding advertisements, requiring brands to adopt more creative and unconventional campaigns [45]. Additionally, a mobile-first approach is crucial, as campaigns not optimized for mobile devices are unlikely to reach this demographic [12]. While their economic influence is growing, their limited access to credit can hinder the promotion of higher-priced products [16]. Furthermore, mental health concerns, reportedly higher among Filipino youth than global averages, pose a unique engagement challenge, demanding empathy and support from organizations [3, 44].

Beyond the private sector, these characteristics hold significant implications for government agencies providing services. [44] observed that Gen Z tends to be risk-averse, well-informed, and more prone to anxiety than previous generations. This means public services, particularly in education, mental health, and youth development, must adapt. Gen Z expects public services to mirror private sector innovations, anticipating user-friendly digital platforms, quick response times, and transparency [16].

The 21st-century public service sector is rapidly changing, requiring government bodies, including those in La Trinidad, Benguet, to adjust to evolving citizen demands, technological progress, and demographic shifts [30]. This municipality's government offices are crucial for providing social welfare, health services, education, and administrative support. As these institutions adapt, Gen Z stands out as a demographic requiring particular attention, expecting personalization and real-time access to services [43].

Engaging with Gen Z presents considerable communication challenges for many government professionals. Traditional bureaucratic, formal, and paper-based interactions clash with Gen Z's preference for informal, rapid, and digital communication [25]. This generational difference can lead to misunderstandings, decreased

satisfaction, and reduced engagement. Research suggests public servants need to develop cultural and generational competence to avoid being perceived as outdated or unresponsive by younger clients who expect immediate and meaningful interactions [26].

Scholars propose strategies for adapting public services to Gen Z's expectations, including digitally upskilling staff, integrating user-centered design, and adopting more participatory and transparent decision-making processes [28]. [16] emphasize that authentic engagement with Gen Z needs social alignment and shared values, qualities often absent in traditional public service models. To foster better intergenerational interaction, training programs focusing on digital communication, inclusive leadership, and youth engagement are recommended [37]. While some local government units in the Philippines have implemented youth desks, mobile applications, and feedback mechanisms for young clients, comprehensive evaluations of these programs remain scarce.

Many local government units, including those in La Trinidad, observe a disconnect between established public service protocols and the expectations of younger clientele. Professionals face challenges in managing digital service delivery, adjusting to informal communication, and addressing Gen Z's priorities regarding mental health and social advocacy [44]. Despite numerous global studies on Gen Z traits and digital transformation in government, there is a notable lack of qualitative research investigating how local government workers and other professionals in specific Philippine contexts like La Trinidad perceive and respond to these evolving dynamics.

Understanding the difficulties professionals face when working with Gen Z clients is incredibly important across various sectors. This research is crucial for enhancing services, improving communication, and ensuring long-term organizational success, especially as Gen Z's population share grows [24]. For public services, particularly in La Trinidad, Benguet, this study can help make services more responsive by aligning them with Gen Z's digital, values-driven, and communication preferences, leading to higher satisfaction and engagement [30, 43]. It can also guide new policies related to youth, mental health, and digital changes within public offices, fostering better intergenerational cooperation and optimizing resource use [3, 28].

In academic institutions, grasping Gen Z's expectations is key for refining teaching methods, curriculum, and student support to better engage digitally native learners, ultimately improving engagement and retention [37]. It also prepares future professionals by offering educators insights into the upcoming workforce's behaviors and expectations [26]. For the private sector, this research provides valuable information for improving customer experiences by tailoring marketing and customer service to Gen Z's demands for authenticity, transparency, and digital-first interactions, boosting loyalty and brand reputation through demonstrating social responsibility [13, 16].

Furthermore, for businesses employing Gen Z, understanding their characteristics can lead to better strategies for attracting, retaining, and maximizing their young workforce's potential [12]. This study fills a critical gap by providing detailed, local insights into real-world challenges and practical solutions regarding Gen Z engagement, moving beyond global understandings to address specific Philippine contexts [25, 44].

Generational Theory and Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

Generational Theory asserts that individuals sharing a common birth period develop similar values and behaviors due to shared experiences [46, 1]. For Generation Z, their formative years spent in a pervasively digital environment have cultivated a native understanding of technology and a strong inclination towards authenticity and social consciousness [24, 33]. This theoretical perspective helps to elucidate the specific expectations that Gen Z clients hold for various services and brands.

Furthermore, Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), proposed by Oliver [29], serves to explain the concept of satisfaction. According to EDT, satisfaction arises when a service's performance meets or surpasses a consumer's expectations, whereas dissatisfaction occurs when performance falls short. In the context of this study, a "disconfirmation gap" can emerge when the strategies employed by professionals do not align with Gen Z's often elevated and digitally informed expectations. This misalignment directly contributes to the engagement difficulties under investigation, demonstrating how unfulfilled expectations can lead to operational challenges.

To address these challenges, professionals can draw upon insights from Digital Communication Theories and Relationship Marketing. Given Gen Z's identity as digital natives, they tend to favor communication that is swift, interactive, and visually oriented in online environments [12, 25]. Consequently, relying on conventional communication methods may lead to difficulties. Moreover, Relationship Marketing, as conceptualized by Berry [4], is vital because it emphasizes fostering enduring and valuable client relationships. Since Generation Z seeks authentic connections and customized experiences, professionals who adopt these principles are better positioned to overcome engagement obstacles.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to explore the challenges in engaging Generation Z clients and understand their emerging expectations.

Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do professionals encounter when engaging with Generation Z clients?
2. How do professionals perceive and adapt to the emerging expectations and behaviors of Generation Z clients?

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative research design that integrated a phenomenological approach with an exploratory case study design. This integrated methodology allowed for a deep understanding of individuals' lived experiences and perceptions within a specific context, especially since the topic had not been extensively researched. The phenomenological approach served as the foundational philosophical framework, guiding the investigation into the "what" and "how" of professionals' experiences by revealing the fundamental nature of the phenomenon through examining the subjective meanings and interpretations participants attached to their interactions with Generation Z clients, the challenges they faced, and their adaptation to evolving client

expectations [10]. To complement this, the exploratory case study design component focused on specific instances or cases, which was appropriate for identifying pertinent issues, questions, and insights within a real-world setting where comprehensive understanding was lacking [47]. This dual approach allowed for a detailed examination of the phenomenon within its specific operational environment, capturing rich, experiential data within a structured framework for analysis in natural professional settings.

Locale and Population of the Study

For this study, participants consisted of professionals who regularly engaged with Generation Z clients across various government offices in La Trinidad, Philippines. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select individuals with direct and significant experience interacting with Gen Z [32]. The participants included roles such as marketing managers, client relationship managers, educators, and service specialists. Participant recruitment involved direct outreach to organizations recognized for their engagement with Generation Z.

Data Gathering Instrument

The primary method for data collection was semi-structured interviews. These interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed experiences, perceptions, and reflections from the participants [18]. To encourage candid responses, interviews were conducted in either English or the local Ilocano dialect, based on the participant's comfort and preference. The interview guide, directly derived from the study's research questions, explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and adaptation strategies regarding their engagement with Generation Z clients, including specific challenges encountered across different sectors (national government agencies, local government units, academic institutions, and business establishments), observations of Gen Z's expectations and local cultural influences, and concrete strategies implemented by participants and their organizations.

Data Gathering Procedure

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online and were audio-recorded with prior participant consent. Document analysis was employed as a supplementary data source, potentially involving a review of internal office documents related to client engagement strategies and training materials focused on Generation Z, contingent on securing official permissions. Furthermore, field notes were diligently taken both during and immediately following each interview session.

Treatment of Data

The collected qualitative data, comprising verbatim interview transcripts (in English or translated from Ilocano) and field notes, underwent thematic analysis. This analysis followed Braun and Clarke's [5] six-phase approach to systematically organize the data and uncover patterns of meaning, with particular attention to the Philippine context. The process began with familiarization with the data, followed by generating initial codes by labeling noteworthy features. These codes were then combined to identify broader themes, which were subsequently reviewed and refined for coherence and distinctiveness. The final step involved defining and naming the themes,

clearly articulating their representation and contribution to answering the research questions, culminating in a comprehensive report detailing the thematic analysis findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines. Approval was secured from all identified respondents, and the informed consent of all participants was obtained, with the study's purpose clearly explained to them. To ensure confidentiality, all collected data were securely stored. Moreover, cultural sensitivity was maintained throughout all stages of the research, from data collection to reporting.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenges Professionals Face When Engaging with Generation Z Clients

The contemporary professional landscape presents a multifaceted array of challenges, demanding adaptability and nuanced understanding from individuals and organizations alike. Among the most prominent hurdles are the intricate dynamics of bridging communication and interpersonal style gaps, particularly as diverse generations collaborate. Simultaneously, professionals are tasked with managing the often-high expectations of Gen Z for authenticity and responsiveness, a generation deeply rooted in a digital world that profoundly shapes their emotional and cognitive processes. Navigating these complexities requires a deliberate approach to foster effective collaboration, cultivate genuine connections, and mitigate the potential negative impacts of an increasingly digital-centric professional environment.

Rapprochement

This study reveals a notable gap in how professionals and Generation Z clients communicate and interact. This is largely because Gen Z prefers fast, visual, and informal digital exchanges, often leading to misunderstandings and a "digital gap" that affects work processes and results. Adding to this complexity are Gen Z's unique social norms, which include more fluid boundaries, a direct way of speaking, and increased emotional sensitivity.

Professionals in government offices are clearly facing challenges in adapting to Gen Z's preferred communication styles. The younger generation's reliance on quick, brief, and visual messages over traditional, formal communication methods is a pervasive observation. This is rooted in their upbringing in a digitally saturated world [44, 12, 25]. For instance, studies by [20] specifically note Gen Z's preference for texting and instant messaging over phone calls and emails in professional environments. Our study participants echoed this, stating, "Gen Z likes quick, concise messages (text, DM, chat) over long emails or phone conversations" and prefers "GIFs, images, or even memes to convey ideas or emotions." These preferences lead to practical difficulties in professional interactions. Participants acknowledged that this can lead to "misunderstanding between the professional and the client" and that "Their preferred communication style like acronyms and modern meanings can be somewhat confusing." This isn't just a preference; it's an expectation for efficient and immediate information exchange [12]. The "digital gap" often causes misunderstandings, as older professionals may perceive Gen Z's swift, informal digital responses as abrupt or lacking detail. One participant vividly described this impact: "There is a visible digital gap between older generations and Gen Z's particularly in using communication platforms nowadays. Gen

Z's are more of digital and instant methods while older ones prefer to use traditional ways. This gap serves as a challenge particularly in the workplace as it affects the process and the outcome – delayed and unmet expected work results sometimes."

Beyond communication methods, professionals often find Gen Z's less formal approach and blurred boundaries challenging. Their upbringing in a digitally connected world, characterized by flatter hierarchies in online interactions, contributes to a tendency to view authority figures more as peers [24, 44]. This can directly conflict with established workplace hierarchies. As one interviewee observed, some Gen Z individuals can appear "rude" and disrespectful toward older people, not just in professional settings but in their general interactions. Another participant shared a specific example from an educational context: "Setting up boundaries between teacher and student Gen Z to treat their teacher like their friend that when you correct their mistakes, they do not acknowledge humbly. Some would either utter some jokes and laugh which is something odd because in the past when you were corrected, you will just say sorry and humbly acknowledge it." This highlights the struggle of professionals to maintain traditional boundaries and expectations of respect.

Still, it's crucial to consider alternative perspectives that suggest what older generations perceive as blurred boundaries or disrespect might actually be Gen Z's natural inclination toward authenticity, transparency, and directness, rather than intentional rudeness [16, 33]. Their comfort with informality stems from growing up in a digital world with less structured social interactions. Their direct approach often reflects a desire for efficiency and honesty, prioritizing straightforward communication over polite but indirect language. Roberta Katz's research [22] indicates that when Gen Z questions rules or authority, it's frequently due to their independent information-seeking habits, rather than inherent disrespect. Similarly, their emotional sensitivity might be better understood as a greater openness about mental well-being and a lower tolerance for high-pressure, unsupportive environments. This signals a change in what they consider acceptable in professional interactions [3, 44], rather than a sign of "weakness."

The inferences of these findings highlight the pressing need for targeted professional development for government office professionals in La Trinidad. Training should focus on equipping them with a deeper understanding of Gen Z's communication nuances, including digital literacy and the effective use of various online platforms. Moreover, workshops on interpersonal skills tailored to Gen Z's expectations, emphasizing active listening, empathy, and constructive feedback, are vital. Understanding Gen Z's perspectives on authenticity and directness, as well as their increased openness regarding mental well-being, will enable professionals to adapt their approach and foster more productive and harmonious interactions. This will ultimately enhance service delivery and facilitate a smoother integration of this digitally native generation into professional environments.

Attunement

The findings indicate that professionals face a significant challenge in adapting to Generation Z's high expectations for authenticity, transparency, and immediate gratification. This often manifests as a perceived sense of

entitlement and a tendency for Gen Z to expect constant appreciation or to challenge authority. Meeting these elevated expectations while maintaining professional boundaries poses a considerable hurdle for professionals.

The bold statement from one participant encapsulates this tension: "The challenge I encounter is difficulty in adjusting to the expectations of Gen Z. As I observe, some students are presumptuous and feeling entitled." This highlights the core struggle of professionals to reconcile traditional service models with Gen Z's demand for genuine, immediate, and personalized interactions. Gen Z's digital-native upbringing has instilled in them an inherent ability to quickly detect insincerity and an expectation for prompt, direct answers. This can translate into a perception of "entitlement" when their expectations for rapid responses and constant validation aren't immediately met.

There's widespread agreement that Generation Z highly values authenticity and transparency. Research consistently shows this generation is skilled at discerning insincerity, expecting genuine interactions from leaders and organizations [16, 33]. As one interviewee confirmed, "Gen Z's high expectations for authenticity they quickly detect insincerity behavior." They anticipate businesses will be open about their operations, values, and even errors, considering this vital for building trust [16]. This isn't merely a preference; it's a fundamental expectation that influences their consumer choices and loyalty, with many Gen Z individuals prepared to abandon brands lacking authenticity [16].

Furthermore, Gen Z consistently demands immediate gratification and swift responses. As an interviewee noted, "Gen Z wants direct and fast answer even in services. They are less considerate to others not unlike previous generation that they extend their patience toward others." Raised with instant access to information and services, they expect quick replies, prompt service, and immediate solutions in all interactions [12, 25]. This desire for immediacy isn't just about convenience; it's a fundamental aspect of their digital-first mindset, where delays can quickly lead to disappointment [12].

Professionals frequently encounter a perceived sense of entitlement among Gen Z, which often appears as demands for continuous praise, swift career advancement, or the expectation that their needs will be met without significant personal effort [12]. Additionally, Gen Z's inclination to question authority or established norms is a commonly noted challenge [22, 44]. This can be particularly difficult for professionals accustomed to traditional hierarchies where respect for authority was standard. As one interviewee explained, Gen Z values "direct communication, authenticity, and relevance," and "they might question rules and authority because they are used to finding what they need on their own."

However, simply labeling these behaviors as "entitlement" may overlook the underlying influences from Gen Z's formative experiences. For example, their expectation of consistent appreciation might stem from the culture of continuous feedback and validation common in digital environments, rather than a feeling of inherent superiority. Similarly, their inclination to challenge authority is often connected to their independent, digitally empowered upbringing, where they're accustomed to independently seeking information and forming opinions rather than

passively accepting instructions [22, 44]. Their questioning of rules frequently indicates a desire for relevance, transparency, and logical reasoning, rather than outright disrespect [22, 33]. They often seek to comprehend the rationale behind decisions, a characteristic that can, in fact, foster more informed choices and greater trust when professionals engage with it constructively [22].

Adaptation

Generation Z's digital upbringing profoundly impacts their emotional well-being, cognitive processes, and engagement styles, presenting significant implications for professionals interacting with them. Professionals observe that Gen Z exhibits heightened emotional sensitivities, requiring empathetic and gentle approaches, especially concerning mental health issues. Simultaneously, their constant exposure to vast digital information fosters a perceived overconfidence in their knowledge and a vulnerability to misinformation, complicating communication and affecting their openness to traditional instruction or guidance. Continuously adapting to Gen Z's unique emotional and cognitive landscape often leads to increased professional strain and burnout.

Professionals are directly witnessing and managing Gen Z's heightened emotional sensitivities and their challenges with mental well-being. Participants noted that Gen Z can be "emotional and weak to handle their problems that sometimes leads to suicide" and "have weak emotions that they are easily intimidated when you stress their mistakes." These observations align with research consistently identifying Gen Z as the most anxious and depressed generation, influenced by factors like cyberbullying, social media pressures, and information overload [3, 44, 35]. This pervasive concern implies that professionals must adjust their engagement styles, prioritizing stress-free environments and being mindful of emotional capacities. Gen Z's increased openness about mental health also means professionals are increasingly expected to act as compassionate listeners and provide supportive environments, altering their traditional roles to accommodate these needs [3].

Compounding these emotional challenges is the cognitive impact of Gen Z's digital world, particularly their vulnerability to misinformation despite being digital natives. Participants frequently expressed concerns, noting, "With loads of information today and easy access to the internet, a lot of people are being misled with unproven knowledge. The challenge is that some accept those misleading information easily without proper research and may affect what they perceive regarding our profession and/or with the treatment we provide, and may lead us with some arguments along the way," and "They are prone to victims of online cybercrime." Studies confirm that Gen Z is more susceptible to believing false information than older generations [6], partly because social media, a primary news source for Gen Z, often lacks rigorous fact-checking [38]. This complicates professional communication, as professionals may need to correct widely accepted but inaccurate information, potentially impacting Gen Z's willingness to accept traditional guidance [6]. Moreover, professionals may observe overconfidence in Gen Z due to their immediate access to extensive information, leading them to believe they "know all" and sometimes disregard detailed explanations or traditional learning [22, 44]. This can manifest as resistance to structured learning or a preference for quick, self-guided information retrieval over deep study. The increasing use of AI tools like ChatGPT also presents challenges to academic integrity, as Gen Z might use these

tools to generate content rather than developing original ideas, making it difficult for professionals to evaluate their genuine understanding [9].

Though, what some perceive as Gen Z's "overconfidence" can also be understood as their curiosity and preference for directness. Their inclination to question and seek immediate answers might not come from arrogance but from their highly efficient, digitally-driven approach to acquiring knowledge. They prefer to find information independently and value direct, relevant details [22]. Their digital proficiency often translates into innovative problem-solving and the ability to synthesize information from various sources [44]. Therefore, their willingness to accept traditional instruction might not signify a general disinterest in learning, but rather a preference for learning methods that align with their digital fluency and emphasis on practical application and efficiency. Professionals clearly recognize this need for adaptation, as evidenced by responses such as "constantly adapting to Gen Z," and "I just do my best in doing my job as a faculty. Stand to what is right and just." The emotional toll on professionals is also evident: "As a professional, to be free from stress, you have to adjust to their emotional capabilities like pressuring them if they cannot do the activity," and "It requires one to have strong mental well-being to educate them, to enforce advises they need, and to provide good service to them. The challenges we encounter teach us, not just as a professional but as a normal individual, to adapt measures on how to de-stress from dealing with difficult situations so that we can also provide quality service at work." These quotes emphasize the personal and professional adjustments required to effectively engage with Gen Z's unique emotional and cognitive landscape.

Professionals' Perceptions to Emerging Generation Z Client Expectations and Behaviors

Professionals generally have a nuanced view of Generation Z, often seeing their innate digital fluency as both a significant asset and a source of unique challenges. This perspective extends to their expectations for immediate, digitally optimized interactions and their distinct approach to online communication and professional boundaries. As this generation increasingly enters the workforce, understanding these diverse perceptions is crucial for fostering effective engagement and collaboration.

Ambidexterity

Professionals generally acknowledge and appreciate Generation Z's natural comfort with technology, viewing it as a source of qualities like open-mindedness, curiosity, and social awareness. However, this deep digital involvement also raises significant concerns for these professionals. They observe a problematic inconsistency where Gen Z's digital upbringing seems to contribute to emotional instability, a perceived sense of entitlement (a "spoon-fed" existence), and difficulties with sustained attention, resulting in a complex and sometimes contradictory view of this generation.

Professionals recognize and appreciate the positive aspects of Gen Z's digital fluency. Their technological proficiency and innovative outlook are frequently highlighted as valuable assets [12, 16, 24, 33]. Participants in this study confirmed these observations, noting that "Gen Zs are usually tech-savvy. Some are innovative, open-minded and curious," and that "gen z are shaped by digital, diverse and socially aware world." Furthermore, their

readiness to embrace modern trends over traditional methods is a recognized trait [12] with participants stating, "They embrace more trend and less appreciate the traditional ways and perspectives". This indicates that professionals see Gen Z's digital savviness as a positive driver for progress and innovation.

But this deep digital immersion is also associated with challenging socio-emotional and cognitive impacts that concern professionals. There is a perception of increased emotional instability and heightened mental health challenges among Gen Z. This aligns with research indicating a rise in anxiety and depression linked to increased screen time and social media pressures [3, 44]. A participant echoed this by stating, "gen z have Emotional instability." This often translates into a greater need for mental health support and difficulties with stress management in professional settings. Another significant concern is a perceived "spoon-fed" existence, where Gen Z is seen as lacking initiative. As one participant articulated, they are viewed as "Instant kid, all their needs is provided," and professionals often feel they "Always take into consideration their mental health and everything must be served to them like lectures, they do not have the initiatives to read books and books and learn on their own." This suggests a perceived over-reliance on external provision of information and tasks rather than independent effort.

Furthermore, the fast-paced, notification-driven nature of digital media has led to concerns about shorter attention spans and a diminished capacity for sustained, deep work [7, 44]. Study participants supported this, observing, "gen. z are direct but informal. Shorter attention spans. Online relationship than offline" and that Gen Z demonstrates "Short attention span; due to their exposure to face-paced digital media. They may have shorter attention span." Finally, there is a perception that continuous digital connection, while offering support, might unintentionally prevent Gen Z from developing resilience through independent struggle and failure, potentially leading to a greater need for reassurance or a lower tolerance for adversity than previous generations. This complex interplay highlights the need for professionals to "strike a balance between innovative approaches and practical actionable outcomes" when engaging with this generation, as articulated by one participant.

Immediacy

Professionals are often faced with Generation Z's expectation of instant, digitally-optimized interactions, which strongly influences how they engage in professional settings. This means Gen Z looks for quick replies, efficient service, and immediate solutions, forcing professionals to adjust their service delivery and workplace methods. This strong desire for immediacy can sometimes lead professionals to view Gen Z as prioritizing speed over quality or lacking the drive for self-directed learning, challenging traditional professional standards.

Professionals consistently observe Gen Z's inherent expectation for instant, digitally-optimized interactions. This stems from their extensive exposure to digital media [34] and manifests as a clear demand for swift responses and efficient services. Participants in this study corroborated this, explicitly stating that Gen Z "expect quick replies, fast service, and immediate solutions" and that "Most Gen Z's expect quick responses. They prefer to do things quickly compromising quality." This desire for speed is sometimes attributed to a perceived shorter attention span in Gen Z [7], leading professionals to note that this generation thrives in dynamic settings but may disengage from

slow processes. As one participant highlighted, "They embrace more trend and less appreciate the traditional ways and perspectives." This translates into a strong preference for modern, digitally connected workplaces and flexible schedules [12, 24], valuing convenience and expecting technology to facilitate their work [16]. Interviewees affirmed this, stating that "Gen Z's appreciate modern setups in the workplace, prefer modern or digitally connected experiences, and seek flexible schedules" and that "they are capable of accomplishing tasks easier through the use of digital platforms in the workplace."

Regarding a "lack of initiative for independent learning," some professionals interpret Gen Z's reliance on readily available digital information as a reduced willingness for deeper, self-directed learning [44]. This perception arises when Gen Z seems to prefer quick, "just-in-time" information retrieval over more traditional, extensive research or reading. However, an alternative viewpoint suggests that Gen Z's learning approach is simply different, often involving self-directed learning through digital resources [33]. Participants observed that Gen Z is "capable of accomplishing tasks easier through the use of digital platforms in the workplace" and that "Gen Z clients are knowledgeable on apps, country vlogs, and so on. They can accomplish task in a better and more creative context." This highlights their proficiency in leveraging digital tools for task completion and information acquisition, even if it diverges from older learning paradigms.

Similarly, the "constant need to prioritize their mental health in all interactions" is a nuanced issue that impacts professional engagement. While all generations increasingly recognize workplace mental well-being, professionals may perceive Gen Z as more vocal and direct in their demands for mental health support and non-pressuring environments [3]. Some view this as increased sensitivity, while others see it as a positive move toward a more empathetic workplace. Research indicates higher rates of anxiety and depression in Gen Z, influenced by factors such as social media and global events [3], making their emphasis on mental health a valid response to their lived experiences. Professionals are increasingly acknowledging the importance of creating environments that accommodate these needs, even if the degree of prioritization differs from traditional norms. As participants stated, Gen Z prioritizes "Mental well-being. They want an environment that will not pressure them" and are concerned with "Their health and how they look to other people." This requires professionals to be more attuned to emotional dynamics in their interactions.

Fluidity

The findings highlight those professionals are actively adapting to Generation Z's unique communication patterns and their evolving understanding of professional boundaries, largely shaped by their digital immersion. Gen Z's communication often strikes professionals as both direct and informal, creating challenges in traditional work settings. This necessitates a more adaptable approach from professionals to bridge these generational communication gaps.

Professionals are grappling with Gen Z's distinct communication style, which is characterized by a blend of directness and informality. This stems from Gen Z's upbringing with constant access to instant messaging and social media, platforms where more casual conversational norms prevail [12, 24]. The belief that Gen Z's shorter

attention spans, due to exposure to fast-paced digital content, influence their communication and cause them to become bored quickly [7] is widely accepted by professionals. Participants supported this, sharing that "Gen Z's are easily bored when communicating with them" and described them as largely "straightforward." One participant even noted, "They surprise me with their straightforwardness. The experience taught me to improve my communication with other people not just at work but also outside of it." Consequently, professionals frequently find that lengthy explanations lead to disengagement, making concise, visually stimulating communication' essential, including a strong emphasis on real-time visual online interactions like video calls [33].

A significant consensus among professionals' points to Gen Z's tendency to prioritize online over offline relationships and their distinct understanding of boundaries. This often leads to a blurring of lines between professional and friendly relationships [44]. Because Gen Z developed socially within online communities where traditional hierarchies are less emphasized, professionals observe them treating supervisors more like peers or expressing personal opinions more openly in professional contexts [16]. This calls for professionals to reassess traditional hierarchical dynamics and consider more collaborative or less formal engagement strategies to foster connection with Gen Z clients.

Interestingly, an irony has emerged: some professionals have noticed that certain Gen Z individuals, especially younger ones, exhibit shyness in direct face-to-face communication despite their strong preference for real-time visual interaction online. This suggests they might prefer the controlled environment of digital communication over spontaneous in-person interactions [44]. One participant shared, "Some of the Gen Zs are quite shy especially the younger ones" when compared to older, more confident generations in direct communication. This implies that while Gen Z might excel in virtual team meetings, they could benefit from more structured in-person interactions to develop their confidence and comfort in offline settings. This observation stresses a potential area where professionals can guide and support Gen Z's development of broader communication skills.

While professionals generally agree that Gen Z's communication style presents unique challenges, the extent to which professionals should "adjust" to accommodate this style versus Gen Z adapting to traditional workplace norms remains an ongoing discussion [12, 24]. This highlights the need for a balanced approach, where professionals are equipped with strategies to effectively navigate Gen Z's digital communication etiquette and fluid boundaries, while also guiding Gen Z toward understanding and adapting to certain professional expectations.

Professionals' Adaptation to Emerging Generation Z Client Expectations and Behaviors

In today's fast-paced world, professionals must constantly adapt to stay effective. This means embracing a digital transformation to engage more responsively and genuinely with others, leveraging new technologies for dynamic interactions. It also requires evolving professional roles and interpersonal approaches, as individuals need to redefine their functions and improve their collaboration skills in an increasingly connected environment. Ultimately, continuous professional development is key to this holistic adaptation, helping professionals not only gain new technical skills but also build the resilience and emotional intelligence needed to succeed in dynamic workplaces.

Modernization

Researchers' findings shows that professionals are actively embracing digital transformation to keep up with Generation Z's demand for instant, accessible services. This means a big change in how services are delivered, shifting towards mobile access, digital tools, and real-time support. This move isn't just about using new technology; it requires professionals to fundamentally change their communication and engagement styles to match Gen Z's preference for authentic, transparent, and immediate digital interactions.

Professionals are adapting to the pervasive digital expectations of Generation Z by implementing swift and accessible digital solutions. Gen Z, having grown up with pervasive digital technology [34], expects immediate solutions and clear, timely digital communication, becoming easily disillusioned by delays or a lack of transparency [45, 12, 44]. As one participant noted, the changes made included "adjusting mobile access and fast service," and offering "mobile apps, self-service portals, live chat, and product offering adjustment." Many professionals are still in the process of adapting to these changes. The adoption of real-time digital tools like instant messaging and social media directly aligns with Gen Z's communication preferences [20], signifying a crucial shift in how services are delivered and interactions are managed.

Beyond merely offering digital tools, there is a strong emphasis on adapting to Gen Z's preference for authentic, human-centric, and less formal digital communication. Gen Z is skillful at recognizing insincerity and values genuine interactions over scripted messages [16]. Participants recognize the importance of being "open and honest in all interactions," as "authenticity builds trust which is vital for long term relationship." This shift involves favoring social media and group chats for announcements and direct messaging [20]. This generation expects organizations to be transparent about their practices, values, and even mistakes, viewing this as crucial for building trust [16, 33]. Participants confirmed this shift, stating that "communication has shifted to being more genuine, informal and human, avoiding scripted message" and relying on "Communication through social media."

Nevertheless, maintaining true "unfiltered" authenticity can be challenging on curated digital platforms. While organizations strive for a human-centric approach digitally, it may not fully replicate the depth of in-person connections. Despite their comfort with digital tools, some studies suggest that Gen Z still values deeper, in-person relationships [39, 44], indicating limitations to digital "human-centricity." Furthermore, building trust and collaboration through digital personalization and openness requires a sophisticated strategy. Delivering genuinely personalized experiences at scale that feel authentic rather than algorithmic can be complex [45]. Professionals must ensure that digital tools and strategies, while designed for instant, authentic interactions, don't accidentally create superficial connections. This is especially important as Gen Z is known for being "exceedingly inquisitive" and wanting to understand the "why" behind processes [22]. Some participants strive to maintain a human touch, stating, "I learned to be assertive when it's needed, be compassionate, be a teacher, a friend, a listener, and a counselor," and advocating for "deeper digital integration, personalization at scale, greater transparency and ethics." This indicates a recognition that true modernization goes beyond just technology, requiring a nuanced human element.

Redefinition

To effectively engage Generation Z, professionals must significantly redefine their interpersonal strategies and roles, moving away from traditional hierarchies to foster authentic relationships and create adaptable environments. This requires professionals to be open, honest, and approachable, while also cultivating supportive and less rigid workplaces. Many professionals acknowledge the need to act as compassionate listeners, counselors, and teachers, embracing current realities and viewing engagement with Gen Z as an ongoing process of redefinition.

Strong evidence from participants suggests a necessary shift away from traditional hierarchical approaches to build authentic relationships with Gen Z. Research consistently shows that Gen Z values transparency, authenticity, and a more personal connection with leaders over rigid authority [16, 33]. They anticipate a "much closer relationship with people of authority" [22, 16], which necessitates professionals being open, honest, and approachable to build crucial trust [22]. Participants affirmed these adaptations, emphasizing the importance of being "open and honest in all interactions," "approachable and reliable," and "more patient and understanding," while also acknowledging the ongoing challenge of "understanding them and taking it as a challenge that all is in a work progress." Learning Gen Z's culture is also seen as vital to better understanding them.

Creating conducive, less strict environments is widely recognized as essential. Gen Z thrives in settings that offer flexibility, psychological safety, and a sense of belonging, preferring these over rigid structures [12, 24]. Professionals are adjusting by fostering environments where Gen Z feels heard and valued, often by being less authoritarian and more facilitative [12]. Participants have echoed this by saying, "Do not be strict to them, always prioritize their mental health, be approachable but do not let them control you," and by focusing on "Creating a conducive environment for learning by not being so strict to them."

Professional roles are evolving to include being compassionate listeners, counselors, and teachers. Given Gen Z's increased awareness and openness about mental health, professionals are called upon to be more empathetic and supportive [3, 44]. This means actively listening to their concerns and providing emotional support, acknowledging the unique challenges of their digital upbringing. Participants expressed their adaptation to these roles, stating, "Listening to their concerns and being approachable" and making sure "to communicate my side and listening and understanding their side." In an educational or mentoring capacity, the "teacher" role has also evolved. One participant noted learning "to be assertive when it's needed, be compassionate, be a teacher, a friend, a listener, and a counselor." While digitally adept, Gen Z may still need guidance on critical thinking, information evaluation, and formal communication, requiring a patient and understanding instructional approach [6, 20].

Gen Z's informal communication style and tendency to treat superiors like peers can inadvertently lead to overstepping professional boundaries [44, 16]. The challenge is to build rapport and trust without sacrificing professionalism or allowing a lack of respect for hierarchical structures, requiring clear yet empathetic communication about expectations. Participants shared practices like "evaluating the concerns of Gen Z clients then we do proper intervention," "providing regular feedback and implementing flexible working strategies," and

offering "easy ways for Gen Z to give feedback or express concern, this could be through surveys, comments sections, or direct messaging." Participants also emphasized providing "real-time support thru live chat, social media, mobile apps have become crucial to meet the immediate needs of Gen Z."

Some might argue that what older generations perceive as "boundary blurring" is simply Gen Z's authentic desire for flatter hierarchies and more direct, less formal interactions. Their directness may be seen as efficient and honest rather than disrespectful [16], and their inclination to question authority may stem from a desire for transparency and understanding, not a challenge to power [22]. Thus, "firm boundaries" might be interpreted as a return to traditional, rigid structures that Gen Z distrusts. One participant agreed, stating that instead of emphasizing "hierarchy or credentials alone," professionals should "share genuine experience." Therefore, the key is not whether boundaries are needed, but how they are established and maintained. This requires professionals to understand Gen Z's culture and motivations and to communicate expectations in a way that respects their values like authenticity and transparency while upholding professional standards. This continuous process of "understanding them and taking it as a challenge that all is in a work progress" highlights the ongoing negotiation of these interpersonal dynamics.

Ultimately, the evolution of professional roles to be more authentic, empathetic, and adaptable is crucial for engaging Gen Z. While professionals are largely embracing roles as compassionate listeners and flexible educators, the primary challenge remains effectively balancing the crucial need for approachability with the maintenance of professional boundaries, which necessitates a deep understanding of Gen Z's unique cultural and communication norms.

Evolution

The findings highlight a critical implication: professionals recognize a vital demand for specific, continuous professional development initiatives to enhance their engagement with Generation Z. This comprehensive training must extend beyond traditional skill sets, encompassing communication, interpersonal skills, technological proficiency, mental well-being support, and adaptive leadership capabilities. This implies that professionals cannot rely solely on informal learning; a deliberate and structured approach to ongoing education is essential for them to evolve alongside Gen Z's dynamic expectations.

Professionals are acutely aware of the need to enhance their skills to better interact with Gen Z. This encompasses a broad range of competencies, from refining communication methods to fostering a deeper understanding of digital platforms and emotional intelligence. Participants in the study emphasized this need, advocating for "actual demonstration of training," emphasizing "communication and soft skills training and technology adaptation," and highlighting "mental health and leadership skills." There is broad agreement that communication and soft skills training are vital to bridge the gap created by Gen Z's digital-first, informal, and authentic communication style [36, 14]. This includes developing better active listening, empathy, and adaptive feedback delivery [21].

Technology adaptation is equally dominant. Given Gen Z's inherent digital fluency and their expectation of seamless technology integration, professionals must become more tech-savvy and familiar with modern terminology and platforms [15, 8]. This goes beyond basic digital literacy; it means effectively utilizing the digital tools Gen Z prefers for communication and information exchange [42].

The demand for professional development in mental health support and leadership skills is also strongly supported. As Gen Z is more open about mental health challenges and experiences higher rates of anxiety and depression [44, 31], professionals are increasingly expected to provide empathetic support and create psychologically safe environments [2]. This requires training in mental health literacy, emotional intelligence, and supportive communication. Regarding leadership, Gen Z expects leaders to be authentic, transparent, empathetic, and prioritize well-being [27, 41]. This drives the need for leadership development programs that cultivate these specific attributes, moving away from purely authoritative styles [17].

While some learning currently occurs through informal observation and advice, aligning with real-world experiences and mentoring, there's a recognized "push for proactive adaptation towards holistic digital engagement and empathetic support" [19]. This signifies a broad understanding that continuous learning is essential to keep pace with Gen Z's evolving expectations, including staying current with trends and continually enrolling in relevant programs. A key point of discussion often revolves around whether organizations are investing enough in structured, specific training for Gen Z engagement, or if professionals are largely left to adapt through informal, trial-and-error methods. The "continuous need to adapt" also suggests that current adaptation might be more reactive than truly proactive, a constant catching-up due to the rapid evolution of Gen Z's preferences and the digital landscape. Ultimately, the demand for continuous professional development to effectively engage Gen Z is unequivocally supported, encompassing a wide range of communication, technological, emotional, and leadership skills.

V. CONCLUSION

This study explored the intricate relationships between professionals and Generation Z clients, uncovering a notable gap in communication and interpersonal styles. Professionals often struggled to adjust to Gen Z's preference for quick, visual, and informal digital exchanges, which frequently caused misunderstandings and affected work performance. Additionally, Gen Z's unique social norms—such as fewer rigid boundaries, direct communication, and heightened emotional sensitivity—often conflicted with traditional professional expectations. Participants commonly viewed Gen Z as having high demands for authenticity, transparency, and immediate responses, sometimes misinterpreting this as entitlement or impatience. The research also highlighted the significant emotional and cognitive effects of Gen Z's digital upbringing, leading to observations of increased emotional sensitivities, susceptibility to misinformation despite being digitally native, and perceived overconfidence or shorter attention spans.

In response to these difficulties, professionals actively adapted their methods, particularly through digital transformation, to meet Gen Z's need for instant, accessible, and genuine online engagement. They revised their

professional roles and interpersonal strategies, fostering more open, honest, and approachable interactions, creating fewer rigid environments, and increasingly adopting roles as empathetic listeners, counselors, and flexible educators. Ultimately, the study emphasizes that professionals are continually learning and developing new approaches to effectively bridge generational differences and deliver quality service in a rapidly evolving digital and emotionally conscious environment.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are put forth to enhance the engagement between professionals and Generation Z clients. Future research should delve deeper into the long-term effects of Gen Z's communication styles on professional relationships and organizational culture, potentially through case studies on successful adaptive strategies within the Philippines or comparative studies across different cultural contexts to understand global variations in Gen Z's communication and expectations. To bridge these generational gaps, organizations must invest in comprehensive professional development programs. These initiatives should prioritize digital communication savvy, teaching professionals how to effectively use various digital platforms, understand online etiquette, and craft clear, visually engaging messages.

Furthermore, training in enhanced interpersonal skills is crucial, focusing on active listening, empathy, and constructive feedback, while also guiding professionals on navigating Gen Z's directness and fluid personal boundaries. Crucially, mental health responsiveness training is needed to equip staff to recognize and support mental health needs and foster psychologically safe environments, acknowledging Gen Z's openness about these issues.

Lastly, adaptive leadership training is vital to help leaders adopt more supportive, transparent, and genuine styles that resonate with Gen Z's values, moving away from rigid hierarchies. Beyond training, organizations must fully embrace and optimize digital tools for client engagement, ensuring quick response times, mobile accessibility, and personalized digital experiences, but always balancing this digital efficiency with efforts to build authentic human connections. Cultivating a culture of openness and authenticity is essential; organizations should be transparent about their operations and values, and professionals need to strive for genuine interactions, as Gen Z deeply values sincerity.

Finally, organizations should foster continuous learning and adaptability, encouraging professionals to stay updated on digital trends, modern terminology, and evolving communication preferences, as successful engagement with this dynamic generation is an ongoing process of evolution.

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