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# Generation Z job seekers' expectations and their job pursuit intention: Evidence from transition and emerging economy

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## Abstract

Understanding Generation Z job seekers' expectations and job pursuit intentions can help organizations successfully attract them. However, there is limited research on this, especially for the transition and emerging economies. With these issues in mind, this study focused on two main objectives: (1) to examine Generation Z job seekers' expectations and their job pursuit intention (JPI) in a transition and emerging economy, with samples from Vietnam, and (2) to advance the understanding of instrumental and symbolic attributes in recruitment literature. We apply the interpretive research method to explore the hidden reasons behind generation Z job seekers' expectations and intentions of their job pursuit. Multiple combining questionnaires and group discussions were conducted with Vietnamese final year students soon to enter the workforce. The results showed that the Vietnamese Generation Z pays more attention to the job/organization in terms of intangible attributes (e.g. office atmosphere or workplace ethics) than physical features. Our study also found that Generation Z considered instrumental organizational attributes and symbolic meaning of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Although some studies have examined the Generation Z expectation in the workplace, no studies investigated the JPI of Gen Z job seekers. In addition, most recent studies investigated the Generation Z expectation in the workplace without using any solid, theoretical foundation underpinning human resource management. Therefore, using an instrumental-symbolic framework in recruitment, our study adds to the literature by examining how Generation Z job seekers react to instrumental attributes and symbolic attributes.

## Keywords

Generation Z job seekers, instrumental attributes, symbolic attributes, job pursuit intention, transition, and emerging economies, acknowledgments

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## Introduction

Over the past decades, Millennials have been the research focus for scholars. Recently, Generation Z, the cohort born from 1997 to 2013,<sup>1</sup> started to catch the attention of researchers.<sup>2,3</sup> In fact, it has been uncovered that each of the above mentioned possesses unique work-related expectations and desires, despite some behaviors they still have in common.<sup>4</sup> Thus, understanding Generation Z job seekers' expectations can help organizations successfully attract them. In addition, Generation Z job seekers' expectations

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are different from their predecessors. Still, they are also large in number, making up nearly one-third of the 7.7 billion global population, many of them residing in emerging countries.<sup>3</sup> Organizations would need to adapt to the large wave of new employees joining the workforce with their uniqueness.

Recent research has confirmed the role of instrumental attributes and symbolic attributes on an organization's attractiveness and considered corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a symbolic attribute.<sup>2,5,6,7</sup> However, previous research has neglected the evolution and change of CSR. Thus, they have failed to adequately consider the reality of CSR in today's globalized world. CSR is not only a symbolic attribute but also an instrumental attribute. Thang and Fassin suggested that CSR consists of two broad categories: internal CSR (e.g. labor practices) and external CSR (e.g. community responsibilities).<sup>8</sup> They also highlighted that labor practices are related to managing a diverse and inclusive workforce, equality, human resources development, occupational health and safety, and working conditions. With these issues in mind, this study focused on two main objectives: (1) to examine Generation Z job seekers' expectations and JPI, and (2) to advance the understanding of instrumental and symbolic attributes in recruitment literature.

It has often been argued that generation Z job seekers' expectations and their job pursuit intention might differ for applicants in different countries or cultures. We thus apply two studies using complementary methods. In study 1, we use a bibliometric analysis of Generation Z, their expectation, and JPI across several reputable journals to present the state of the intellectual structure and identify emerging trends in the research field.<sup>9</sup> In study 2, we apply interpretive research to explore hidden reasons behind generation Z job seekers' expectations and their intention to pursue jobs. Multiple combining questionnaires and group discussions were conducted with 48 Vietnamese final year students soon to enter the workforce.

This article contributes to and differs from the prior research by addressing the following important gaps. First, although some studies have examined Generation Z expectations in the workplace, including organizational culture and values alignment,<sup>10,11</sup> job satisfaction and career prospects,<sup>12</sup> onboarding programs in the early days of their career,<sup>2</sup> CSR,<sup>7,13</sup> no studies investigated the JPI of Generation Z job seekers, especially in the transition and emerging economies such as Vietnam where a significant number of them is found. Second, most recent studies (e.g. Chillakuri 2, Schroth 4, Lis 7) investigated Generation Z expectations in the workplace without using any solid, theoretical foundation underpinning human resource management (HRM). Therefore, using an instrumental-symbolic framework in recruitment<sup>14</sup> our study adds to the literature by examining how Generation Z job seekers

react to instrumental attributes and symbolic attributes. We believe this deepens our understanding of Generation Z job seekers' expectations and preferences for a particular attribute. Our results can help human resource managers better understand the instrumental and symbolic factors to emphasize in recruitment advertisements to attract job seekers of Generation Z. Third, while several prior studies considered CSR as a symbolic organizational attribute, Generation Z job seekers in Vietnam see CSR as both a symbolic and instrumental attribute. This finding highlights the need for both researchers and managers to change for adaptation and would also complement the unbalanced research in the CSR field, which has had more focus on the developed countries (Gharleghi, Afshar Jahanshahi and Nawaser, 2018).<sup>15</sup>

The article is organized as follows. First, we describe Generation Z, job pursuit intention, and how prior research has examined the relationship between Generation Z expectation and job pursuit intention. Second, we briefly explain the research methodology used in the paper. Third, we present the main results and findings. Fourth, we provide the discussion with several theoretical and practical implications. Finally, we outline some limitations and suggest avenues for future research.

## Literature review

### Generation Z

Research suggested that although Generation Z shares with Millennials some common characteristics such as valuing work-life balance, communicating digitally, desiring to lead, possessing a high entrepreneurship spirit<sup>4,16</sup> (Schroth, 2019; Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021), they behave differently due to the major events occurring around them. Hence, they deserve to be treated uniquely. Generation Z came into existence during the economic recession, high unemployment rate, and the rapid growth of the Internet and mobile devices.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, they are often referred to as digital and mobile natives, a characteristic widely endorsed by scientists.<sup>18</sup> They are also concerned about how human social interaction could be affected by the intensive use of smart devices, which could lead to a need for social skill improvement.<sup>19,20</sup> Apart from being more racially and ethnically diverse, they appreciate education and financial responsibility more than their parents.<sup>17,21</sup> As consumers, Gen Zers, who are less brand loyal,<sup>22</sup> consider consumption as the way to express themselves and access products or services, whereas owning them is not important.

Additionally, although conducted in emerging economies where consumers are relatively more price-sensitive, researchers concluded that CSR-related products strongly catch their attention and would be bought if the products' quality and price meet expectations,<sup>23</sup> or even with

additional fees.<sup>24</sup> The purchase decisions of Generation Z are heavily influenced by Web 2.0 due to the trust in the information shared via the Internet and social networks<sup>25</sup> and E-commerce transactions are not seen as unsafe.<sup>26</sup> As learners, Generation Z expects proper training to be able to apply new skills to the assigned tasks<sup>27</sup> and highly appreciates the role of teachers yet also considers YouTube as their preferred learning method channel. Nevertheless, Generation Z's digital learning intention is affected by the availability of the required facility and resources<sup>28</sup> As job seekers, Generation Z will be attracted to an organization based on both instrumental attributes such as pay, benefits, or work-life balance two and symbolic attributes such as CSR.<sup>10,11</sup>

Perhaps as Generation Z is a new cohort to the job market, research on them and the workplace is at a nascent stage.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have shown that this Generation has its expectation towards jobs. They greatly value work-life balance, supervisors' frequent feedback, and high tech and human connection. In addition, they are also attracted to organizations that frequently implement CSR activities.<sup>23,29,30</sup> The fact remains that Generation Z has officially started working with different behaviors and expectations. Organizations must respond effectively to the trend to attract talent and stay competitive.

### *Job pursuit intention*

The instrumental-symbolic framework has provided a theoretical foundation for research in marketing.<sup>14</sup> Instrumental attributes are tangible and enable consumers to maximize benefits and minimize costs. Conversely, symbolic attributes are intangible and provide symbolic value for consumers. Using this framework in recruitment, researchers have argued that job seekers are interested in potential employers' instrumental and symbolic attributes. More specifically, while job seekers pay attention to instrumental attributes of organizations, such as salary, benefits, working hours, or location,<sup>14</sup> they are also interested in symbolic attributes of organizations, such as competence, prestige, sincerity, or ethical image.<sup>31,32</sup>

Organization attractiveness (OA) is passive and refers to "individuals' affective and attitudinal thoughts about particular companies as potential places for employment" (Highhouse, Lievens and Sinar, 2003).<sup>33</sup> To attract more applicants, organizations are increasingly focusing on both instrumental and symbolic attributes as employers of choice. In contrast, JPI is more active and regarded as a separate concept that originates from job seekers attempting actively to find out more information about the organization, its job opportunities, and eventually getting a job interview.<sup>34</sup> Existing literature (e.g. Nugroho<sup>35</sup>) shows that OA influences on JPI. In addition, JPI is also separated from job choice, which refers to the willingness to join the

organization's workforce by accepting the job offer.<sup>36,37</sup> Recent research revealed that JPI determination criteria varied in different countries; for example, the Americans emphasized compensation, advancement opportunities, thrift, and style while the Belgians care about advancement opportunities, trustworthiness, and dominance of thrift and style.<sup>38</sup>

According to the instrumental-symbolic framework, Generation Z job seekers are also attracted to the tangible benefits of organizations. Recent studies show that this Generation wants a positive attitude, clear targets, clear instructions from their boss in the workplace and on-the-job training,<sup>4</sup> meaningful work, performance feedback, personal connection, work-life balance, and learning and development.<sup>2</sup> Despite their interest in instrumental attributes of organizations, however, Generation Z job seekers are still expected to seek the symbolic meanings of an organization. Indeed, there is evidence that Generation Z job seekers are also attracted to socially responsible organizations or good CSR-based organizations. For example, Lis found that to attract highly qualified graduates, companies are not only acting responsibly for themselves but also demonstrating their social commitments.<sup>7</sup> Such a finding suggests that Generation Z job seekers assigned traits to organizations and tended to be especially attracted to potential employers with traits like their own.

Prior research also suggested that job seekers' behaviors differ among countries.<sup>38,39</sup> However, most recent studies (e.g. Schroth 4, Lis 7, Network for Executive Women and Deloitte,<sup>10</sup> McCrindle Research<sup>11</sup>) agreed that Generation Z is more ethnically than any other generation. Thus, diverse ethical business practices might increase JPI because job seekers feel that they will have chances to affirm the identities that they value. Accordingly, companies that can send out positive CSR signals associated with economic, environmental, ethical, legal, and philanthropic responsibility will improve their JPI outcome.<sup>40</sup> Another study on the relationship between sustainability and JPI revealed that economic welfare, skill development, and employee health and safety commitments of the organizations have an impact on the JPI of job seekers. In contrast, environmental concerns do not influence such objectives.<sup>39</sup>

### *Generation Z expectation and job pursuit intention*

To get a broader view of this subject matter, we conducted a bibliometric analysis on Gen Z, their expectation, and JPI across several reputable journals (e.g. Sustainability, Journal of Business, Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management...) from 2015, a moment that according to our observation, this Generation started to draw attention from scientists as new members of the workforce rather than university students, till the very beginning of 2022 when this article was finished off writing. Some authors<sup>2,8</sup>

collected data from intern Gen Zers who started to make a fresh start in their career. In this analysis,<sup>23</sup> related papers were identified in [Appendix I](#).

Although the authors implemented various research methods to analyze different aspects of Generation Z, quantitative research was found predominant with 61%. On the other hand, the qualitative methods have been conducted creatively in various formats such as face-to-face interviews, role-playing, and, interestingly, phone interview, which was applied by Goh and Baum<sup>49</sup> for a quarantined hotel during the Pandemic. With a mixed-method approach, Maioli<sup>45</sup> analyzed Gen Z's expectations from their point of view and the managers from various industries.

Globally speaking, the Generation captured curiosity from authors from both developing and developed countries. However, curiously enough, we found a few common characteristics in terms of research concern which is recently scholars from emerging economies seem to be more interested in technology-related topics (e.g. Industry 4.0, Poland,<sup>29</sup> Malaysia<sup>22</sup>), (e.g. Web 2.0, India<sup>25</sup>) while generally CSR and well-being of Generation Z caught attention from both.

More importantly, even though the vast majority of the papers unveiled the expectation of Gen Z, only four mentioned their JPI. None of the four was conducted in an emerging economy. The latter triggered our curiosity to explore further the relationship between an emerging economy Generation Z's expectation and their JPI with the data collected from Vietnam combined with a qualitative approach, a method implemented with lower frequency by authors according to our analysis yet could help us explore this Generation more profoundly.<sup>19</sup>

## Methodology

### Research approach

This paper adopts an interpretive approach that widely used in Information System and in Management related fields.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it has provided a methodological foundation for research across a range of management literature, such as accounting (e.g. Jansen<sup>50</sup>), leadership (e.g. Felix et al<sup>51</sup>), and human resource management (e.g. Podgorodnichenko et al<sup>52</sup>). This approach provides a rich and in-depth understanding of participants' views and gains insights into the nature of the subject matter through semi-structured interviews<sup>53</sup> and a key role played by the researchers.<sup>54</sup> Most importantly, IR does not discard quantitative approaches<sup>2</sup> but rather provides us with a separate viewpoint and is especially helpful when the research field is still new to scholars.<sup>52</sup>

Generation Z job seekers are just now entering the labor market. Their presence, both in terms of new traits and behaviors that they might have compared to the other

generations and their large quantity, especially in the transition and emerging economies, would require prudent attention from scientists and organizations. As mentioned earlier, among those 23 papers identified in our bibliometric analysis, a greater part was performed quantitatively which would hinder us from understanding Generation Z profoundly since quantitative methods might be biased or inaccurate<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, among the remaining papers, only three adopted face-to-face interviews for emerging markets (e.g. India,<sup>2</sup> Argentina,<sup>45</sup> Slovakia<sup>46</sup>). Finally, Walsham<sup>56</sup> argued that one of the obstacles that researchers could face is gaining the access to the targeted people and rejection could be common. In our case, the students were chosen on a voluntarily basis from a large pool, facilitating the research process. Thus, in this study, with an objective of enriching the literature of the Generation Z in the emerging market extensively, IR was implemented because it is usually carried out to explore hidden reasons behind new and complex social phenomena.<sup>55</sup> In this research, opinions and suggestions by Generation Z job seekers will provide an interesting picture of their expectations for potential employers.

### Sample and procedure

To better understand Generation Z job seekers' expectations and their job pursuit intentions in a transition and emerging economy, qualitative research was conducted with two groups of interviewees who were final-year students in six universities in Hanoi, Vietnam, and were soon to enter the workforce. [Table 1](#) presents the key characteristics of the sample.

Participants were final-year students who registered to find a job at the University Student Employment event of six universities in Hanoi. The students were asked to participate in the research process during the event voluntarily. As a result, 24 students with no previous work experience from several disciplines such as economics, engineering, art, communication, and journalism, and 27 students with some working experience expressed their interest in participation. Eventually, to obtain fair outcomes, the research team decided to keep an equal amount of 24 interviewees in each group and assigned members who were still new to the workforce to Group A and the remaining to group B. Since the attractiveness of organizations is perceived more by job seekers with experience than by those without,<sup>57</sup> we were interested to find out if their behavior varied. The participants were a fair balance between males (21 students) and females (27 students).

The data collection method used was multiple combining questionnaires and focus groups, and the process ran from May to June 2020. During the first month of the study, the two groups of participants received a set of questions of an open-ended type allowing them to freely express their

**Table 1.** Interviewees information.

	Work experience	Age range	Gender		Participant Pseudonyms
			Male	Female	
<b>Group A</b>	No	18–22	8	16	A1, A2, A3...A24
<b>Group B</b>	Yes	20–23	13	11	B1, B2, B3... B24

opinions, expectations, or decisions on the subject matter.<sup>53</sup> Three major themes emerged: working environment, work-life balance, and CSR. We also found some unrealistic expectations from participants.

In the second month of the investigation, each group was divided into four sub-groups of six persons. Each attended a semi-structured face-to-face focus group discussion that lasted from 60 to 90 min about the three themes. We consecutively conducted eight group interviews during the four weekends of June 2020, a month that Covid 19 was not having a serious impact on our normal life in Hanoi. The member of the subgroups, starting from those belonging to group A, were invited to the Hanoi School of Business and Management, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, for the interviews. The language used during this event was Vietnamese; the messages conferred were then translated into English.

**Analysis**

This study adopted content analysis, which effectively reveals group open-ended survey data.<sup>58</sup> The researchers coded the interview transcripts manually as job pursuit intention, organizational attractiveness, working environment, physical working condition, social working condition, a portrait of the manager, CSR, recruitment process, and unrealistic expectations. Data from the two groups were separated and compared to determine whether there were any dissimilarities in their expectations or attitude toward the subject matter. To maintain the anonymity of the respondents and ease of reference, participants of Group A were named from A1 to A24 and those of Group B from B1 to B24, respectively.

**Findings**

A small sample size allows us to discuss during our face-to-face focus group discussion in more detail. Several work-related issues versus Generation Z’s expectations were analyzed. Nonetheless, only the issues that caught the most attention from the interviewees are summarized and evaluated in this paper. The issues are working environment, work-life balance, CSR, and unrealistic expectations.

**Working environment**

The definition of a working environment covers two main dimensions: work and context. Work covers many aspects of a job, from how it could be accomplished, job achievement, and task variety to the value generated. Context, the second dimension, consists of physical and social working conditions.<sup>59</sup>

When questioned about this aspect, all respondents showed great interest in the second dimension. Generally, a friendly, “work must be fun” atmosphere or a happy social environment, as also revealed by Ozkan and Solmaz,<sup>44</sup> with high teamwork spirit where colleagues often hang out with each other is expected.<sup>46</sup> Several participants pointed out the importance of going beyond the professional relationship and making friends. Sincerity and workplace ethics are very important to them. Additionally, between workers, collaboration is favored over the competition. These can be seen in the quotes below:

“...Colleagues matter since you will work most of your life...” (B4).

“I would like to be part of a company where everyone has a nice attitude towards each other” (A3).

“It would be easier if I could work with people that could be treated as friends because I would be able to share my opinions with them without hesitation. This makes me feel like having significantly contributed to the company” (A15).

“...Colleagues matter since you will work most of your life. I expect a working environment where all members could be sincere to each other, not just among colleagues but also between the employees and the employer...” (B4).

“As a newcomer to the workforce, I observe and listen to stories. I have seen some companies where their employees are not ethical. Some are not honest with their managers; some worse cases, even steal merchandise from the company... I want to work in an ethical environment because the prestigious ethical image of the company will also be mine...” (B9).

Both groups agreed that physical conditions make the organization more attractive, even though they could not specify the type of physical condition expected. The participants shared the same general concept of an open, clean

office space previously described by Iorgulescu<sup>43</sup> in her research on Gen Z in Romania and a nice break room instead of the traditional cubicle desk. Perhaps, due to the working experience gained, several members of Group B referred to some big corporations, such as Viettel, FPT, Samsung, or Nestle, to name a few, as an example of good physical conditions, as shown below.

“The headquarter of Viettel looks fascinating, very different from the others. Although I still do not know what I would be doing there, I love that kind of workplace” (B23).

“I have been working for Nestle Vietnam for nearly 1 year, and the experience is great. Their impressive innovative interior design always makes me feel productive and relaxed at the same time” (B18).

As noted above, both aspects of the context, the second dimension, are attractive to participants. However, when asked whether the intangible attributes (e.g. office atmosphere, sincerity, or workplace ethics) or the physical features (e.g. office space, office design, chair and desk, pantry) were more important,<sup>39</sup> voted for intangible attributes,<sup>5</sup> voted for physical features. The rest did not give an immediate response. Some examples follow.

“Well, a cool office space is nice, although I would prefer to have a relaxing environment. I hope to find a company that could offer me both” (A5).

“I am an easy person. As long as the people around me are sincere and we could be happy working with each other, I would be satisfied, I don’t mind if the physical condition is not perfect” (A18).

“For me, it is pretty straightforward. I have to work around 40–50 h per week, a nice office with bad colleagues would only make me stressful. I don’t want to drag myself to work every day” (B7).

### Work-life balance

Work-life balance could be achieved once the job we do for a living complements the element of our full life rather than forces us to choose our priority.<sup>60</sup> Flextime, including part-time work and tele-homeworking, could improve work-life balance and reduce absenteeism and sick time while increasing productivity.<sup>61,62</sup>

Except for only one participant, B8, who would require more specific information to decide, all the others considered the traditional way of working of 8h per day, 5days per week, unattractive from the job applicant’s point of view. Most would like to have a certain level of autonomy to decide their own flexible time throughout the day, which could be used to go to a gym, meet a friend or run some

errands. Furthermore, participants support the idea of being able to work out of the office occasionally. They also showed much interest in how clear the flexibility rules at the workplace are communicated and implemented. These ideas can be seen in the examples below.

“Staying in the office the whole day could be boring and make it hard to stay focused. The solution to it could be having the flexibility to switch the working environment” (A3).

“Some Vietnamese creative agencies give their employees the right to choose their workplace, either in office, at home or elsewhere, in exchange for being reachable 24/7 as long as they complete their tasks. I like that idea very much” (B3).

“You work to live, not you live to work” Ideally, we should be able to work half of our time in the office and the other half elsewhere. They still can get the job done and at the same time solve the personal issues” (B1).

“...I think I would accept the way organizations currently work. Maybe I would be able to work from home” (B8).

The responses of our interviewees matched with other previous studies and market research where work-life balance and flexibility are highly valued by Generation Z.<sup>2,10,11,48</sup> Perhaps, “Can I have work-life balance when working for that company?” is one of the few questions that could be supported by 100% of the focus group participants.

### Corporate social responsibility

CSR affects the organizational attractiveness as a potential employer.<sup>5</sup> During our interviews, the participants gave the impression that they seemed to have a wide understanding of CSR, its related activities, and what firms could benefit from. We identified a consensus that such activities could positively affect their intention to apply for the job, which 15 members confirmed from group A and 19 from group B. Some examples follow.

“...Some of the corporations have gone green; for example, Fresh Garden is using paper straw, Big C and Lotte are promoting the use of recycled bags, and they are gaining support from the customers. Once graduate, the companies that care about the environment will be my target as an employer” (A7)

“Companies still can be profitable while being socially responsible, and they can give more employment opportunities to disabled people, for instance. I know a company employing many disabled people to make and sell traditional crafts near Ha Long Bay, and the store attracts many customers, including foreigners” (B21).

“The government has been fighting against corruption so hard recently, and I am very happy with it. I will always do a lot of



research on the company I work for to ensure transparency” (B23).

“We studied CSR during our bachelor’s degrees. It was interesting to find out firms could benefit from being socially responsible to the environment, community, customers, and the workers” (A17/B25).

Although our study aims to reveal the link between the Generation Z expectations and their JPI, we also found that individuals were also greatly concerned about the firms’ socially irresponsible activities, which could create a negative impact on both Generation Zs JPI and job loyalty. This can be seen in the following.

“I think my friends would seriously criticize me if the company where I work for is polluting a river or using child labor. If I were in that situation, I would change my job immediately” (A4).

“Regarding ethical issues, I believe that our generation is aware of our choices. My friends and I have talked about these so many times. We don’t want to be part of any unethical decision” (A15).

“I quit my first job because the management prioritized the employment of male workers. As a woman, I think I was lucky to be hired, but I dislike gender inequality. It was quite a large corporation though” (B13).

“I have blacklisted some companies with bad CSR reputation. You know, I do my research and talk to people. There are so many companies out there. I would like to avoid those” (B22).

### *Unrealistic expectations*

Earlier studies have suggested that managing Generation Z’s expectations would be challenging because they hope for meaningful and interesting tasks to be assigned to them.<sup>2,4,49</sup> In our study, the companies’ expectations seemed unrealistic as they wanted to be valued as important and irreplaceable throughout the recruitment, adaptation, and staff development process. For example:

“I put great effort into what I want to achieve and have very high expectations for the companies” (A2).

“The fact that recruiters show interest in me during the recruitment process is very important” (A20).

“I want to feel that they are genuinely interested in me, not just in anybody” (B6).

“I shouldn’t be replaceable because what I do is important for the company, and as an individual, I should also be respected” (B8).

Most of the members showed a low degree of organizational commitment early in their careers. For example, all members of group A, although possessing no working experience, agreed that they would change their job a few times before deciding to settle down in an organization. For example:

“Spending my whole career in a single company, working hard and then retiring is not my plan, even well-off” (A3).

“There are so many organizations and opportunities today, why we should endure with only one” (B24).

While the respondents gave prominence to the opportunity to grow within the firm, they expressed that a limited clear career development plan from the recruiting organizations might lead to job-hopping. Some suggested:

“I highly appreciate the development opportunities and the career plan that the employers have for me. I wouldn’t mind switching jobs until I find such an employer” (B2).

“If I am offered a better opportunity to grow somewhere else, I might accept it if the current employer doesn’t do anything to retain me. I would not change job just for fun or curiosity” (B4).

When asked about an ideal company to work for, nearly one-third (7 of 24) of Group A and one-half (12 of 24) of Group B disclosed a strong desire to work for well-known Vietnamese or international firms because they believed that their profiles would immediately improve and catch more attention from the other recruiters once they leave said organizations. For instance:

“... I have a list of the largest Vietnamese companies such as Vingroup, Viettel, FPT... I plan to work for them for a short time and then, I will be able to get a higher position in a smaller company” (A15).

“Well, a CV with a reputable multinational company name would catch recruiters’ attention. That’s how we get a higher pay job” (B5).

## **Discussion**

### *Theoretical implications*

This study aims to advance the understanding of the Generation Z job seekers’ expectations and their JPI in the transition and emerging economies with the data collected from Vietnam. Our findings show that Generation Z, with or without working experience, highly values and consider both instrumental and symbolic attributes. Such results support previous studies that have observed the influence of the instrumental and symbolic attributes on the JPI of

Millennial job seekers (e.g. Kumari and Saini<sup>6</sup>) and Generation Z job seekers (e.g. Schroth<sup>4</sup>) or Generation Z expectations for onboarding (Chillakuri<sup>2</sup>). However, our study extends the previous finding by adding some new insights. Previous studies have not compared the instrumental and symbolic attributes of the job seekers' expectations. Our study shows that the Vietnamese Generation Z pays more attention to the job/organization in terms of intangible attributes (e.g. office atmosphere, sincerity, or workplace ethics) than physical features. Several reasons may contribute to this finding. First, while instrumental job/organizational attributes play a critical role in attracting job seekers, most job seekers are unlikely to know about a particular organization's real working environment, compensation, and benefits policies. Perhaps, Generation Z's initial attraction to an organization is the symbolic meaning of an organization. Second, Generation Z has greater economic well-being than any other generation. They have been found to value fun culture, social environment, and flexibility<sup>11,45</sup> and value salary less than every other Generation.<sup>10,41,47</sup> Third, Vietnamese cultures are predominantly collectivistic. Culture shapes individuals; hence, individuals are embedded in collectivistic cultures' group identity, community, and spiritual values.<sup>63</sup>

The Vietnamese Generation Z participated in our research process and highly valued flextime and autonomy but did not expect them to be granted at the beginning of their career. Such a finding might be explained by their lack of work experience, understanding of businesses<sup>42</sup> and expectations about workplace coaching and training. In addition, the participants shared a common belief that technology companies could only provide flextime or working from home and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), while conversely, more established and big organizations are more traditional. These findings are not in line with a recent study uncovering that HRM practices of SMEs tended to be more traditional and built based on a large business HRM model.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, our interview does not allow us to explore this contradiction in more detail.

CSR can be seen as part of the symbolic organizational attributes.<sup>5</sup> Our findings show that both internal CSR (e.g. gender equity or business ethics) and external CSR (e.g. continuous environmental and social activities) are highly valued by Generation Z. Such results are consistent with the findings of Schroth<sup>4</sup> that Generation Z appreciate and would expect diversity, equity, and inclusion from an organization and Network for Executive Women and Deloitte<sup>10</sup> shows that to attract Generation Z, organizations need not only to pay attention to their ethics but also to demonstrate their commitment to societal challenges such as sustainability, climate change, hunger, and poverty.

However, as compared to instrumental factors, Generation Z rate CSR higher than other instrumental factors,

such as pay, bonus, and benefits in their JPI. In comparison to Millennial job seekers, our finding differs from Kumari and Saini's<sup>6</sup> findings when they indicate that career growth opportunities, an instrumental factor, had the highest effect on JPI. At the same time, CSR, a symbolic factor, is a weak predictor of JPI. Two possible reasons might explain this. First, Generation Z differs from its predecessors in many aspects such as expectations, education, work ethics, and behaviors because cultural values and practices change over time.<sup>4</sup> Second, CSR has evolved in stages like social conditions of work, health and safety at work, responsible employee relations, and human development in the workplace. Accordingly, we believe that Generation Z may consider career growth opportunities or work-life balance part of CSR for employees.

This finding is a logical extension of the existing literature when the combination of external and internal CSR is considered. External CSR relates to activities that have environmental protection, community development, and sustainable aims. In contrast, internal CSR has an objective of improving the satisfaction of internal stakeholders (e.g. employees) through practices like career orientation, training and development, diversity programs, and safety enhancement.<sup>8</sup>

In several prior studies, researchers considered CSR as a symbolic factor. They focused on studying the CSR signals in attracting job seekers,<sup>65,66</sup> CSR image and communication in attracting potential employees,<sup>5</sup> CSR reputation in influencing JPI<sup>6</sup> or CSR practices in increasing employees' creativity while decreasing intention to leave the company.<sup>15</sup> While these studies make important contributions, our finding indicates that Generation Z is not only concerned with the CSR signals or reputation in general but also is motivated by CSR activities (e.g. career growth opportunities or work-life balance) implemented for employees or an organization's labor practices in JPI. Thus, CSR covers both instrumental and symbolic attributes, which we believe is a unique contribution of our study to literature.

### *Practical implications*

The findings of our study also have implications for managers. First, to attract the best Generation Z talent, managers today in the transition and emerging economies have to understand Generation Z expectations for JPI and the unrealistic expectations of the Generation. Accordingly, managers need to design effective HRM interventions (e.g. office atmosphere or work-life balance programs) and provide a realistic job preview for Generation Z job seekers to improve applicants' decisions about job fit, reducing the turnover rate. Second, our study shows that CSR had changed as a response to the public interest and included a broader set of real activities rather than symbolic attributes. Thus, companies must not only demonstrate their

commitment to a broader set of CSR but also act consistently with their ethics and values because Generation Z is more highly educated. Ethical than any other generation.<sup>4</sup> This meant that managers in transition and emerging economies need a strategic approach to CSR by integrating CSR into the company's policies if they want to win Generation Z's hearts and minds.

## Conclusion

There is limited research on understanding Generation Z job seekers' expectations and JPI in the transition and emerging economies. We focused on examining job seekers' expectations and JPI to advance understanding of instrumental and symbolic attributes in the recruitment literature. Our results showed that the Vietnamese Generation Z paid more attention to the job/organization in terms of intangible than physical features and considered CSR an organizational instrumental and symbolic attribute. These findings have theoretical and managerial implications regarding recruitment literature and practice.

While our study has important implications for HRM and CSR research, it has limitations. First, this revolves around a small sample size of participants from only one transition and emerging economy, Vietnam, at one time. Therefore, our findings should not be generalized to Generation Z as a whole. Replications of similar research in other transition and emerging economies could give us a more global picture of the findings in developed countries for comparison and contrast purposes. Second, the study adopted a qualitative approach. It may not provide statistical representation, and data collection may have a degree of bias, which may lessen the accuracy of the findings. Future studies should consider employing a quantitative approach with a large sample size.

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## Appendix I

Review on gen Z expectation and JPI

No	Author	Sample size	Response rate (%)	Location	Gen Z's expectation	Gen Z's job pursuit intention (JPI)
1	Goh and Lee <sup>12</sup>	178	39	Australia	Hospitality is an exciting people contact industry, but the people component is also perceived as difficult	Family members highly influence the decision to work in the hospital industry
2	Chillakulari <sup>2</sup>	136	100	India	Organizations to have clear visions, values, and strategic objectives. Flexible work arrangement, transparency, career advancement, and growth	N/A
3	Cyfert et al <sup>29</sup>	646	Not specified	Poland	The importance of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of CSR could be augmented by the application of management solutions supporting industry 4.0	N/A
4	Sun et al <sup>30</sup>	463	Not specified	Not specified	N/A	In-kind donations improve Gen Z's JPI more than cause-related marketing (CRM)
5	Tang et al <sup>20</sup>	400	100	China	Their national culture influences the subjective well-being (SWB) of Chinese Gen Zers	N/A
6	Kurniawan et al <sup>41</sup>	200	Not specified	Indonesia	Indonesian Gen Z students are not attracted to startup unicorns due to their salary and benefits, but ethics, CSR, and diversity	N/A
7	Gabrielova and buchko <sup>16</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	The expectation of leadership style, motivation, teamwork, and social interactions of Gen Z might make them enter into conflict with Gen Y, who currently should be their managers	N/A
8	Lestari <sup>26</sup>	1047	100	Indonesia	E-commerce transactions are not perceived as risky	N/A
9	Rodriguez et al <sup>42</sup>	51	100	USA	Career development, flexibility, ranks, and reward system for performance	N/A
10	Thach et al <sup>3</sup>	1329	86	USA	Enjoy socializing with family and friends	N/A
11	Thangavel et al <sup>22</sup>	260	94	Malaysia	To be able to compare and contracts products in the E-commerce platform before making a purchase decision	N/A
12	Iorgulescu <sup>43</sup>	188	83	Rumania	Open space office, group work, generous salary, and job security	N/A
13	Priporas et al <sup>19</sup>	58	66	UK	Enhanced smart information technologies to match their buying needs and concerned about the negative impact on interpersonal relationships derived from intensive usage of smart devices	N/A
14	Ozkan and Solmaz <sup>44</sup>	276	100	Turkey	Happiness in the workplace with a low degree of authority	N/A

(continued)

**Appendix I** (continued)

No	Author	Sample size	Response rate (%)	Location	Gen Z's expectation	Gen Z's job pursuit intention (JPI)
15	MacGregor Pelikánová and MacGregor <sup>24</sup>	250	72	Czech Republic	Good CSR practices and willingness to pay extra for products and services that are CSR related	N/A
16	Maioli <sup>45</sup>	400	100	Argentina	Good salary, job stability, and a clear career path	N/A
17	Ariker and Toksoy <sup>23</sup>	272	92	Turkey	Attracted to companies that conduct CSR activities and would purchase their products or services of the price set is reasonable	N/A
18	Vasan <sup>25</sup>	150	100	India	Fun, humorous aspects and credibility of information provided via web 2.0 would enhance the purchase decision	N/A
19	Kirchmayer and Fratričová <sup>46</sup>	235	100	Slovakia	Being able to enjoy work, build a good relationship with colleagues, and achieve professional goals	N/A
20	Grow and Yang <sup>47</sup>	98	89	USA	A lower degree of interest in money and higher in the stability and personal fulfillment	N/A
21	Cho et al <sup>27</sup>	306	100	USA	Proper training to obtain the right skills for the assigned tasks	Volunteer activities are considered an intermediary step for seeking jobs
22	Sánchez-Hernández et al <sup>48</sup>	131	100	USA	Good work environment, work-life balance and flexibility	N/A
23	Goh and baum <sup>49</sup>	42	100	Australia	Working in a quarantined hotel is exciting, and courage is required	Family support has an important impact on the motivation to seek a job in a quarantined hotel due to safety reasons