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Simultaneous Convergence and Divergence: A Global Generation Paradigm Perspective on Gen Z Work Values

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Abstract

This study explores Generation Z's work values through the lens of the global generation paradigm, which argues that digitalization and cross-cultural interaction foster shared value clusters beyond national boundaries. A cross-cultural survey was conducted with 1,934 respondents (ages 18–26) from the USA, Germany, Japan, and Türkiye, representing diverse cultural contexts in Hofstede's dimensions of individualism–collectivism and uncertainty avoidance. Work values were assessed using Lyons et al.'s (2010) 32-item scale across four dimensions: instrumental, cognitive, social, and prestige. Analyses (CFA, MANOVA, ANOVA, planned contrasts, ANCOVA) revealed a hybrid pattern of convergence and divergence. Cognitive values such as learning, development, and creativity were consistently emphasized across all countries, supporting the global generation paradigm. However, instrumental, social, and prestige values differed significantly: collectivist cultures (Türkiye, Japan) stressed security, belonging, and prestige, while individualist cultures (USA, Germany) prioritized autonomy and achievement. Gender and country × gender interactions showed no significant effects. These findings introduce the notion of 'simultaneous convergence and divergence,' a hybrid conceptual lens that extends the global generation paradigm by reconciling cultural convergence and divergence perspectives. This theoretical contribution provides a more integrative framework for understanding how generational values evolve within both global and local contexts.

Key words: Global Generation Paradigm, Human Resources Management, Strategic Management, Work Values

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1. Introduction

The first quarter of the 21st century has witnessed three major transformation processes progressing in parallel on a global scale: digitalization, cultural globalization, and demographic transitions in workforce structures (Twenge, 2017). These transformations not only change the nature of economic systems but also profoundly redefine the normative framework of working life, organizational forms, and the meaning relations individuals establish with work. In this new era, where intergenerational differences are becoming more pronounced, Generation Z—widely accepted in the literature as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (e.g., İlhan, 2019; Twenge, 2017)—emerges in working life with an entirely new set of values; this compels organizations to rethink their talent management, motivation, and engagement strategies (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Schroth, 2019).

Generation Z is regarded as a cohort that grew up in direct contact with digital technology, integrated into global networks at an early age, and developed a high level of individual awareness. Its emphasis on values such as flexibility, speed, meaning, impact, and digital adaptation makes it not only distinct from previous generations but also a social profile partially independent from national-cultural norms (Ng et al., 2010; Twenge, 2017). At this point, relying solely on demographic boundaries is insufficient to understand generational identity. Mannheim's (1952) generational theory, which he pioneered, conceptualized generations as clusters of collective consciousness shaped under similar historical conditions, while contemporary literature has added new dimensions to this approach. In particular, the global generation paradigm, proposed by Edmunds & Turner (2005), argues that under the influence of digitalization and cultural globalization, generations can be shaped within a shared value universe that transcends national borders.

Despite the growing scholarly attention to generational differences and cross-cultural work values, existing studies have largely examined these domains separately. Prior research has tended to treat generation as a demographic or psychological category, and culture as a static contextual variable, without integrating them under a unified analytical lens (e.g., Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; McMullin et al., 2007). This separation limits our understanding of how globalization and digital interconnectedness simultaneously produce convergence and sustain divergence in value orientations.

Moreover, in recent years, the global generation paradigm has been revisited through the lenses of digital cosmopolitanism and evolving debates on generational identity in hybrid digital contexts. Scholars argue that mere technological fluency no longer suffices to capture the complex value formations of young people (e.g. Mertala, 2024; Fu, 2024). From a digital cosmopolitanism viewpoint, youth increasingly develop transnational symbolic repertoires and moral imaginaries that transcend national boundaries. As such, the paradigm of a "global generation" should not be understood simply as a shared digital experience, but rather as a socio-cultural orientation shaped by algorithmic cultures, platform ecologies, and

mediated public spheres. Embedding this approach in the present study underscores that digital connectivity is not merely a technological condition but a constitutive environment for value formation in working life (Leurs & Georgiou, 2016).

Addressing the work values of Generation Z in a globally comparative manner beyond local cultural contexts is an important need both theoretically and practically. This is because organizations operating on a global scale are now confronted not only with a workforce shaped by a specific set of cultural norms but with employees whose generational values converge or diverge across different geographies. This situation requires reconsidering both the strategic dimension of human resource management (HRM) and the literature on cross-cultural work values.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to comparatively examine the work values of Generation Z within the framework of the global generation paradigm. Focusing on the United States of America (USA), Germany, Japan, and Türkiye—countries that exhibit distinctly different profiles in terms of individualism–collectivism and uncertainty avoidance within Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory—the study seeks to trace structural similarities emerging under the influence of digitalization, even in contexts where cultural differences remain decisive. The main reason for focusing specifically on individualism–collectivism and uncertainty avoidance is that these two cultural variables have the strongest influence on shaping work values. According to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory, individualism–collectivism determines orientations related to autonomy, belonging, and social relations, whereas uncertainty avoidance directly affects factors such as job security, stability, and risk perception. Furthermore, the four countries selected exhibit distinct differences on these dimensions: the USA and Germany stand out with high individualism and relatively low uncertainty avoidance, whereas Japan and Türkiye diverge with collectivist tendencies and high uncertainty avoidance scores (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Building on this theoretical background, the present study introduces an alternative conceptual lens. The distinction between "crossvergence" and the conceptualization of "simultaneous convergence and divergence" proposed in this study is both theoretical and empirical. While crossvergence (Ralston et al., 1997) implies a gradual synthesis in which global and local influences merge over time into a single, hybrid cultural logic, simultaneity refers to a dynamic coexistence of these forces operating concurrently within the same generational context. In other words, convergence and divergence do not succeed one another but unfold simultaneously across different value dimensions. Empirically, this simultaneity is evidenced by the coexistence of shared cognitive orientations (e.g., learning and development) with persistent cultural divergences in instrumental, social, and prestige values. Hence, the present study reframes value formation not as a linear blending process but as a multidirectional equilibrium shaped by both global and local dynamics.

In this framework, the study tests two opposing approaches: cultural convergence, which argues that similar value orientations emerge across different cultures (Inglehart, 1997; Ralston et al., 1997); and cultural divergence, which maintains that national and local norms still play a decisive role in shaping generational identity (Hofstede, 2001; Smith et al., 2011). The bridge this study seeks to build between these two approaches aims not only to understand the behavioral codes of Generation Z but also to contribute to grasping the future of working life with a more holistic perspective.

2. Literature Review

Work Values

Work values are fundamental psychological orientations that determine individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and priorities regarding working life, helping us understand what they expect from work, what they value, and under what conditions they are motivated (Ros et al., 1999). In this sense, work values represent in-depth preferences that affect not only job choices but also career development, life satisfaction, and organizational behaviors (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Judge & Bretz, 1992). Moreover, according to Super's (1990) life-span career theory, individuals' vocational orientations and expectations from work are reshaped throughout the life cycle; this reveals that work values may vary depending on time, experience, and social context.

In the literature, work values have often been classified into two basic categories: intrinsic and extrinsic (Meglino et al., 1989; Ros et al., 1999). Intrinsic values refer to the psychological satisfactions derived from the work itself, encompassing elements such as learning opportunities, autonomy, self-actualization, creative expression, meaningfulness of work, and personal development (Hartung et al., 2010; Lyons et al., 2010). In contrast, extrinsic values focus on the benefits obtained as a result of work; salary, job security, prestige, promotion opportunities, and organizational support fall into this category (Kalleberg, 1977; Schein, 1990).

However, the literature has increasingly emphasized the need for multidimensional approaches to analyze individuals' complex expectations and the different sources of satisfaction in working life more comprehensively (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This has led to the development of more comprehensive and multidimensional classification models for understanding work values. One such model, proposed by Lyons et al. (2010), conceptualizes work values in four dimensions: instrumental, cognitive, social, and prestige. In this framework, instrumental values (e.g., financial gain, job security) represent work-related extrinsic rewards; cognitive values (e.g., learning, development, meaning) represent intrinsic satisfaction; social values (e.g., collegiality, teamwork) represent relational needs; and prestige values (e.g., status, recognition) represent the need for social visibility and acknowledgment. This multidimensional structure goes beyond the classical intrinsic–extrinsic dichotomy, offering deeper analytical

possibilities. Accordingly, more recently developed models have expanded the scope of work values. For instance, the New Work Values Scale (NWVS) (Stiglbauer et al., 2022) and the Integrative Work Values Scale (IWVS) (Busque-Carrier et al., 2022) highlight new value dimensions such as autonomy, work-life balance, ethical orientation, innovativeness, and social impact.

On the other hand, the formation of work values is a dynamic process shaped by individuals' life experiences. Multilayered factors such as socialization, education, gender roles, age and professional experience, organizational culture, and socioeconomic conditions play a role in the development of these values. For example, in the study of the New Work Values Scale developed by Stiglbauer et al. (2022), while no significant differences were found between generations in basic needs and organizational sustainability values, meaningful differences were observed in motivational values such as clarity, money, career, development, stimulation, and relating between younger and older generations. In addition, a study conducted by Kozák & von Soest (2024) demonstrated that work values formed during high school years affect individuals' social and professional achievements in adulthood. These findings are consistent with theoretical frameworks suggesting that individuals' basic psychological needs for self-determination—autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000)—may have a direct impact on their values and work expectations. Similarly, educational and organizational contexts shape which values individuals prioritize, while demographic variables such as industry structure and age play a decisive role in this process (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014; Stiglbauer et al., 2022).

Along with these, the cultural context is also an important determinant in the shaping of work values. Hofstede (2001), with his cultural dimensions theory, argues that cultural value systems play a central role in individuals' preferences regarding working life. For example, in individualist cultures (e.g., the USA, the Netherlands), autonomy, entrepreneurship, and individual achievement are emphasized, while in collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan, Türkiye), group solidarity, belonging, and job security carry higher importance (House et al., 2004). Empirical studies conducted in various cultural contexts also confirm these differences (den Boer et al., 2021; Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy, 2021; Silva & Carvalho, 2021).

Work values are significantly associated with many organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, burnout, work engagement, turnover intention, and organizational commitment. The literature shows that individuals who attach importance to intrinsic values have higher levels of job satisfaction and psychological well-being, whereas those who prioritize extrinsic values are more likely to experience dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover risk (Busque-Carrier et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2025). On the other hand, individuals with social values are more frequently observed to exhibit collaboration, organizational citizenship behaviors, and team cohesion (Busque-Carrier et al., 2021; Ros et al., 1999). In this context, there is a predictable directionality between work value orientation and organizational outcomes: intrinsic and social values are generally associated with

positive psychological and performance outcomes, while extrinsic values are associated with more short-term motivational responses and negative outcomes (Busque-Carrier et al., 2021; Duffy et al., 2016; Knardahl et al., 2024; Morris et al., 2022).

The Global Generation Paradigm

The concept of generation is addressed in the sociology literature not merely as a demographic category but as an analytical framework that refers to social groups historically situated and shaped by shared experiences (Gibson et al., 2009; Lub et al., 2014). The theoretical foundation of this approach is Mannheim's (1952) classical generation theory. According to Mannheim (1952), a generation consists of individuals born in the same period, exposed to similar historical events, socialized within a shared socio-cultural context, and thereby developing similar mental structures. This definition leads us to evaluate generations as social actors positioned within historical and social contexts.

However, this theoretical approach pioneered by Mannheim (1952) has been criticized for being largely based on Western-centered historical narratives and for neglecting cultural plurality (Inglehart, 1997; Parry & Urwin, 2011). The criticisms argue that similar historical events are experienced in different ways across distinct socio-cultural contexts, which limits generational definitions in cross-cultural comparisons. On the other hand, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) assert that with the institutionalization of individualization processes in modern societies, generational identities have become more flexible, dispersed, and plural. This perspective necessitates examining generational structures that are dynamic and open to cross-cultural interaction rather than fixed generational typologies. In this regard, Gilleard & Higgs (2005) developed a critical perspective against the structuralist view by arguing that generations are not shaped solely on the basis of age but also by social position, media representations, and societal narratives.

Thus, the spread of digital technologies, the homogenization of media systems on a global scale, and the acceleration of cross-cultural communication have highlighted the need for a new conceptual framework that carries generational identity beyond national borders. Responding to this need, the global generation paradigm was first systematically proposed by Edmunds & Turner (2005). The researchers argue that since the last quarter of the 20th century, media, digital communication, global consumer culture, and neoliberal economic policies have created similar life practices and value systems among younger generations. In particular, collective experiences shaped through media—such as the student movements of the 1960s, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, or post-2001 global security discourses—are suggested to have triggered similar structures of historical consciousness among young people across different geographies, transcending nation-state boundaries.

The common point emphasized by these approaches is that generational identity is now shaped not only by historical time but also by cultural transmission,

digital experience, and media representations. In this context, the generational paradigm draws attention both to the transmission of content through media and to the transformation of modes of communication. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2009) explain this transformation with the concept of a "cosmopolitan generational identity," stating that generations are constructed not only through national historical narratives but also through global risks, crises, and media experiences. Thus, they emphasize that the national context is not the sole determinant in the formation of generational identity, but that global interactions play a structural role. This situation is argued to have become even more visible in the case of Generation Z. This generation, having encountered technology at an early age, able to establish global connections through digital platforms, and share common symbols via social media, has developed a global value agenda around themes such as equality, environmental sustainability, digital privacy, and multiculturalism (De Boer et al., 2021; Schroth, 2019; Tapscott, 2009; Twenge, 2017).

Nevertheless, the paradigm is not free from criticism. Thorpe & Inglis (2019) note that the concept of the global generation is sometimes confused with age cohorts, and that socio-structural determinants such as social class, gender, and ethnicity are overlooked. Furthermore, it is emphasized that the digital divide deepens technological inequalities and that global experiences are not equally accessible to everyone (Woodman & Wyn, 2015). These criticisms consider the global generation approach to be overly generalizing by assuming a homogeneous youth identity. Indeed, alternative perspectives seek to challenge this homogenizing assumption. For example, the glocalization approach (Robertson, 1995) argues that global cultural currents are not internalized in the same way in every context but are instead reinterpreted with local cultural dynamics to produce "hybridized" youth identities. Similarly, transnational youth debates point out that while young people establish global connections, they still develop multilayered identities shaped beyond nation-state borders by factors such as social class, migration experiences, or ethnic identity (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). More recently, post-millennial debates have argued that Generation Z should be positioned not only through digital nativeness but also through historical experiences such as economic crises, climate concerns, and social polarization (Seemiller & Grace, 2019).

Generation Z

Generation Z is generally defined in the literature as encompassing individuals born between 1995 and 2012, recognized as digital natives and the first generation to grow up fully immersed in digital technologies (Dolot, 2018; Schroth, 2019; Twenge, 2017). This cohort has been raised in a socio-cultural environment interwoven with mobile technologies, social media, constant online presence, and global networks (İlhan, 2019). As a result, they stand out distinctly from previous generations due to their high technological literacy, rapid access to information, and familiarity with visually oriented, personalized forms of communication (Gaidhani et al., 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Members of Generation Z also maintain a stance that is distant from authority yet open to collaboration (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). They prefer horizontal relationships and flexible communication over traditional hierarchical structures and value working environments with wide individual expression spaces and high psychological safety (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). Stillman & Stillman (2017) emphasize that the ways in which this generation participates in working life may conflict with traditional work culture, thereby requiring new-generation workforce management approaches.

In addition, Generation Z views work not only as a means of livelihood but as a meaningful part of life; they prioritize flexible working hours, remote work opportunities, work-life balance, and psychological safety (Gallup, 2016; Randstad, 2016; Schroth, 2019). Consequently, these expectations have become key factors determining the retention and organizational commitment of Generation Z in the workplace (Ng et al., 2010). Generation Z explicitly values work arrangements that are flexible, remote/hybrid, and conducive to work-life balance and psychological well-being (Deas & Coetzee, 2022). These expectations are closely related to the retention and organizational commitment of Generation Z employees; while alignment of value orientations and fulfillment of psychological needs strengthen commitment and retention, a lack of flexibility and balance may increase the risk of turnover (Knardahl & Christensen, 2024).

Empirical research demonstrates that the work values of Generation Z are shaped around elements of intrinsic motivation. Maloni et al. (2019) and Silva & Carvalho (2021) found that this generation prioritizes cognitive and intrinsic values such as learning, development, autonomy, and meaningfulness more than extrinsic rewards. In particular, elements such as “the meaning of work” and “personal contribution” play a decisive role in Generation Z’s job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Dahiya & Raghuvanshi, 2023; Kim et al., 2024). In this regard, the motivational factors of Generation Z rest less on traditional reward–punishment systems and more on continuous feedback, recognition, personalized development opportunities, and flexible structures (Dobrowolski, 2022, Emanuelsson & Turesson, 2023). Moreover, this generation is more sensitive to values such as diversity, inclusivity, and social responsibility in the workplace (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). In this context, the desire of employees to “be valued” and “make a difference” leads to more enduring and satisfying outcomes than material rewards (Dahiya & Raghuvanshi, 2023).

Nevertheless, the literature also indicates that some structural characteristics of Generation Z are regarded as potential weaknesses. Twenge (2017) states that compared to previous generations, this cohort experiences higher levels of anxiety and tends to prefer digital channels over face-to-face communication in their social interactions. This situation may lead to outcomes such as loneliness in the workplace, a lack of belonging, and a heightened risk of burnout (Woodman & Wyn, 2015). In addition, the strong tendency toward individualization can at times weaken intra-group collaboration and limit organizational synergy (Parry & Urwin, 2011).

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How the value structure of Generation Z is shaped at the cross-cultural level, however, remains a matter of debate. Den Boer et al. (2021), in their study examining samples from China, Germany, the Netherlands, and Thailand, found that Generation Z individuals universally prioritize intrinsic values such as learning, development, and visible results, whereas values such as status, respect, and hierarchy revealed more pronounced cultural differences. Similarly, Silva & Carvalho (2021) noted that in the Portuguese sample, values centered on social responsibility and societal benefit came to the fore. These findings indicate that the value structure of Generation Z is formed at the individual, generational, and cultural levels but, under the influence of digitalization, is increasingly globalized. For multinational enterprises and policymakers, this makes it a strategic necessity to accurately understand the value orientations of the young workforce and to develop flexible, meaningful, and inclusive work models accordingly.

Cultural Comparison: The USA, Germany, Japan, and Türkiye

One of the widely accepted approaches in the organizational behavior literature is that work values are strongly influenced by cultural context (Hofstede, 2001; Inglehart, 1997). Indeed, culture is a fundamental variable in determining what individuals expect from work, how they define job satisfaction, and what type of work environment they prefer (House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 1994). In this regard, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1980; 2001) is one of the most frequently used theoretical models for analyzing cultural profiles of countries. According to Hofstede, cultures differ across six basic dimensions: individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity–femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence–restraint. These dimensions provide a functional framework for understanding employees' value orientations, expectations from work, and tendencies in organizational preferences.

Considering especially the dimensions of individualism–collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, which are the main focus of this study, the USA is characterized by high individualism (91/100) and low power distance (40/100), representing a cultural profile that prioritizes individual achievement and entrepreneurship (Hofstede et al., 2010). This structure creates an organizational atmosphere that encourages horizontal hierarchy, open communication, and personal initiative (House et al., 2004). Generation Z in the USA, consistent with these values, places high importance on independent work, rapid career advancement, and flexible working conditions (Schroth, 2019; Twenge, 2017). Data from Gallup (2016) reveal that this generation demands performance-based feedback, personalized development opportunities, and meaningful work experiences. The pursuit of meaning and competitiveness emerge as two intertwined core values within this cohort (Ng et al., 2010).

Similarly, Germany is defined by low power distance (35/100), high uncertainty avoidance (65/100), and relatively high individualism (67/100) (Hofstede et al., 2010). This profile supports organizational behavior norms such as

adherence to rules, systematic approaches, and a focus on structure. In the German work culture, disciplined work, long-term planning, and transparent decision-making processes are prominent. Generation Z in Germany, consistent with this cultural background, values clear roles, structured responsibilities, and professionalism based on technical competence (Kaiser & Ringlstetter, 2019). At the same time, increasing demands for personal development, learning opportunities, and work–life balance have also been observed (Maloni et al., 2019). Participatory management, openness, and transparency in decision-making processes are other important factors shaping the workplace preferences of German Generation Z (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018).

On the other hand, Japan, with its high uncertainty avoidance (92/100), long-term orientation (88/100), and strong collectivist structure, represents a culture in which traditional values are integrated with institutional structures (Hofstede et al., 2010). Japanese work culture emphasizes norms such as discipline, hierarchy, and group-based decision-making, while employees' long-term commitment to the organization and search for stability stand out. Generation Z in Japan largely maintains this cultural legacy, continuing to value group loyalty, teamwork, and employment security (Sato et al., 2021). However, with digitalization and global interaction, modern values such as individual autonomy, creative expression, and personalized career paths have become more visible within this cohort (Den Boer et al., 2021; Thorpe & Inglis, 2019). Thus, Japanese youth preserve traditional collective values while simultaneously evolving toward a more individualized and digitalized value orientation in line with the global generation paradigm.

Türkiye, by contrast, with its high power distance (66/100), high uncertainty avoidance (85/100), and a hybrid cultural structure that balances individualism and collectivism, exhibits a mixed cultural profile (Hofstede et al., 2010). This structure both supports respect for authority and hierarchical organization and, at the same time, allows room to some extent for individual achievement and the search for autonomy (GLOBE, 2004). In this respect, Türkiye occupies a transitional position between collectivist cultures such as Japan and individualist societies such as Germany and the USA (Aycan, 2006). In Turkish work culture, structural elements such as job security, directive leadership, social relations, and solidarity are prominent. The high tendency toward uncertainty avoidance increases the need for stability and predictability (İlhan & Alimanoğlu Yemişci, 2020). Generation Z in Türkiye, while carrying these traditional values, also exhibits more flexible, individualized, and meaning-oriented value orientations shaped by digitalization and global interactions (Yılmaz et al., 2024). Research shows that this generation demonstrates a strong interest in personal development, flexible work models, and the search for meaningful work, while also attaching importance to social support, teamwork, and a sense of trust. Thus, Turkish Generation Z develops a hybrid pattern of work values that blends traditional values with global trends (İlhan et al., 2019; İlhan & Alimanoğlu Yemişci, 2020; Yılmaz et al., 2024).

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Justification of Hypotheses

The question of to what extent the work values of Generation Z converge or diverge across cultures is addressed in this study along two main theoretical axes: the global generation paradigm (Edmunds & Turner, 2005) and cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001). However, it should also be noted that individuals' value orientations regarding working life are shaped not only by cultural structures but also by psychological needs, motivational tendencies, and social norms. Therefore, in justifying the hypotheses, theories with explanatory power at the micro level were also taken into account.

In this respect, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989), and Value-Belief-Norm Theory (VBN) (Stern et al., 1999) were considered as theoretical foundations to explain the formation of work values in a multidimensional way. These theories argue that individuals' value orientations are shaped not only by the cultural context in which they are situated but also by universally experienced psychological needs and the interaction of social structures.

Within this framework, the general hypothesis of the study is based on the assumption that, under the influence of the global generation paradigm, Generation Z develops similarities that transcend cultural boundaries in certain value dimensions, but at the same time shows significant differences in certain dimensions due to the influence of cultural norms and individual need structures.

> H_1. Generation Z's work values are similar across countries in certain dimensions, while in others they differ significantly depending on cultural differences.

Instrumental values represent individuals' extrinsic motivations related to work. According to SDT, when basic psychological needs are not met, extrinsic motivations become dominant (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, COR theory suggests that individuals, especially in uncertain economic environments, develop behaviors aimed at preventing resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Within this approach, it is expected that instrumental values will be given greater importance in countries with relatively low economic stability.

> H_{1a}. Generation Z's instrumental work values (financial gain, job security) differ across countries depending on economic conditions.

Cognitive values are directly related to individuals' intrinsic motivations. SDT argues that individuals are inherently oriented toward goals such as learning, development, and meaning, and that these values develop relatively independently of cultural context (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Digitalization and global access to information provide a basis for these values to become similar across cultures among Generation Z.

H_{1b}. Generation Z's cognitive work values (personal development, learning opportunities) are similar across different countries under the influence of globalization and digitalization.

Social values are related to individuals' relational needs. According to SDT, the need for belonging is universal; however, how this need is met varies depending on cultural context (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In collectivist societies, this value is structured around group harmony, while in individualist societies it is structured around personal relationships (Hofstede, 2001).

H_{1c}. Generation Z's social work values (relationships with colleagues, cooperation) differ between individualist cultures (USA, Germany) and collectivist cultures (Türkiye, Japan).

Prestige values are based on individuals' need for social visibility and recognition. VBN theory argues that when values are combined with social norms, they exert a stronger influence on behavior (Stern et al., 1999). In collectivist societies, social approval and status carry greater importance as part of group dynamics, whereas in individualist cultures, success is evaluated more on an individual basis.

H_{1d}. Generation Z's prestige work values (recognition, status) are more highly valued in collectivist cultures (Türkiye, Japan) and less emphasized in individualist cultures (USA, Germany).

3. Methodology

Purpose

The primary aim of this study is to examine the work values of Generation Z individuals at the cross-cultural level within the framework of the global generation paradigm and to reveal, from a comparative perspective, how these values are shaped at the intersection of digitalization and cultural factors. In this context, in the samples of the USA, Germany, Japan, and Türkiye, the four-dimensional theoretical structure developed by Lyons et al. (2010) was taken as the basis, and the instrumental, cognitive, social, and prestige value dimensions were evaluated. Thus, the study analyzed the extent to which these value dimensions are similar or different across countries and empirically tested the cultural convergence and cultural divergence approaches.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of Generation Z individuals born between 1997 and 2012 who currently reside in the USA, Germany, Japan, and Türkiye and are employed. This scope is based on the birth range of Generation Z (add reference) and, in addition to participants' ages, considers their active participation in working life. Therefore, in determining the sample, the age range

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of 18–26 was chosen to ensure that participants met the criterion of having work experience.

Since labor force statistics for this age group are calculated with different methodologies in each country, the study focused not on population size but on a sampling strategy that would optimize cross-cultural comparisons (Thompson, 2012). In this context, a two-stage strategy was adopted. In the first stage, an equal-quota stratified sampling approach was used to optimize cross-cultural comparisons, with equal numbers of participants (500 each) drawn from every country (Kline, 2016). Although the target was to collect 500 valid responses from each country, slight deviations occurred (n = 463–502). These variations resulted from the exclusion of incomplete or inconsistent responses during data cleaning and from adjustments made to maintain proportional representation in regional and demographic strata. Accordingly, the final dataset retained only cases meeting the inclusion criteria for employment status, age range (18–26), and response completeness, ensuring data quality and cross-cultural comparability. In the second stage, a multistage stratified sampling method was employed to represent the regional and demographic diversity of each country (Groves et al., 2009). Accordingly, in the USA sample, the east, west, south, and Midwest regions were represented in a balanced manner. The German sample included both northern and southern states as well as major industrial centers. The Japanese sample included not only major metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Osaka but also small and medium-sized industrial cities. In the Turkish sample, metropolitan areas such as İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir were represented alongside industrial- and service-oriented cities from different regions of Anatolia (central, western, and southeastern). In this way, a design was adopted that better met the assumptions of MANOVA and ANOVA analyses and balanced within-group variances. Within this scope, the total sample size of 1,934 provides high statistical power ($1-\beta > 0.80$) at a 95% confidence level, according to Cohen's (1988) medium effect size criterion ($f = 0.25$) (Faul et al., 2007).

Data Collection Process

In this study, a quantitative research design based on the survey model was adopted in line with the structure of comparative cross-cultural analysis. As the data collection instrument, a standardized questionnaire technique was used, enabling a multidimensional assessment of participants' work values. The survey was administered online in 2025, and data were collected from samples in four different countries, consistent with the theoretical framework of the research. Participants were recruited through professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn and through university career and alumni networks in the respective countries. These channels enabled access to verified young professionals representing Generation Z across diverse sectors.

The basis of the questionnaire was the Lyons Work Values Scale (LWVS), developed by Lyons et al. (2010). This scale was constructed based on items derived

from various previously developed work values scales, tested through successive empirical studies for validity and reliability, and finalized in its 32-item form. The scale enables a multidimensional evaluation of individuals' attitudes and expectations regarding working life.

Before the LWVS was administered to the four country samples, it underwent a cultural adaptation process. First, the original English form was translated into Turkish, German, and Japanese by two independent researchers proficient in each target language. Then, a separate group of language experts performed back-translation, and the items were compared with the originals to ensure semantic equivalence (Brislin, 1980). To enhance cultural appropriateness, pilot tests were conducted with small groups of 30–40 participants in each country, examining item comprehensibility, linguistic consistency, and scale format. Based on the pilot results, minor linguistic adjustments were made while preserving the structural integrity of the scale. This process strengthened the validity of the instrument across different cultural contexts and enhanced the methodological transparency of the research.

The LWVS conceptualizes work values in four main dimensions: instrumental (e.g., financial gain, job security), cognitive (e.g., learning, development), social (e.g., collegiality, belonging), and prestige (e.g., recognition, status). Within this scope, some example items presented to participants included: "Working in a job that provides you with good pay" (Instrumental), "Having continuous opportunities for learning and self-development" (Cognitive), "Working with understanding, kind, and sincere colleagues" (Social), and "Having a job that is highly respected and prestigious in the eyes of others" (Prestige).

All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to rate each item on a scale ranging from "1 = Not at all important" to "5 = Extremely important." Higher scores indicated that the participant attached greater importance to the respective work value, whereas lower scores reflected lesser importance.

In the final section of the questionnaire, demographic questions were included to allow a more detailed analysis of the structural diversity of the sample. This section measured variables such as gender, age, education level, and work experience, with the data used for sample description and statistical control procedures.

Data collection was carried out between 03 May and 10 July 2025. The entire process adhered to the ethical principles set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki and received approval from the Ethics Committee of Beykoz University (Ethics Approval No: 4, dated 02.05.2025).

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Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data obtained in this study, SPSS 28.0 and AMOS software were employed. SPSS is a widely used and reliable software in the social sciences for conducting descriptive statistics, variance analyses, and covariance controls. AMOS, on the other hand, provides easily interpretable outputs with a visual interface for confirmatory factor analyses and structural model testing. Alternatives such as Mplus or similar software could have been used; however, in line with the research design and hypotheses, the SPSS/AMOS packages were deemed sufficient and appropriate for carrying out the required analyses.

The analysis process was structured at two levels, in accordance with the multidimensional theoretical framework and comparative nature of the study: core analyses that directly tested the hypotheses, and supplementary analyses that enhanced the originality of the research. In the core analyses, preliminary tests were first applied to the dataset. Missing values, outliers, and the normality assumption (Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests) were examined, and variance homogeneity was assessed using Levene's test. The reliability of the LWVS was tested with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, with results above the acceptable level across all dimensions. In addition, the four-dimensional structure of the scale was tested through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and model fit indices were reported.

Subsequently, descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and demographic distributions were calculated for each country. To test the hypotheses, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was applied, with the four value dimensions as dependent variables and country as the independent variable. For dimensions where significant differences were identified, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted, and Tukey HSD post-hoc tests were used to determine the direction of differences between groups. Planned contrast analyses were also performed to examine differences between individualist cultures (USA, Germany) and collectivist cultures (Türkiye, Japan).

In the supplementary analyses, a correlation matrix was first computed to examine the relationships among the four value dimensions. To control for the effects of demographic variables (age, education level) on value orientations, ANCOVA was conducted. Finally, multiple regression analyses were performed to test the predictive power of age, gender, education level, and work experience on the value dimensions.

3. Results

Preliminary Analyses and Reliability of the Scale

Before proceeding with the analyses, preliminary checks were conducted on the dataset. The proportion of missing data was examined, and no significant loss

was observed. Outliers were evaluated using the ±3 z-score threshold and Mahalanobis distance, and extreme values that could compromise the integrity of the analyses were removed. The normality assumption was tested with the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests, and skewness and kurtosis coefficients were found to be within acceptable ranges. Homogeneity of variances was checked with Levene's test, and the assumptions required for ANOVA and MANOVA were met.

The reliability of the four dimensions of the LWVS was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (Table 1). The instrumental ($\alpha = .89$), cognitive ($\alpha = .87$), social ($\alpha = .84$), and prestige ($\alpha = .81$) dimensions all demonstrated high internal consistency. The four-dimensional structure of the scale was tested through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), yielding $\chi^2/df = 2.1$; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .048; SRMR = .041. These values indicate that the scale is consistent with the theoretical structure and provides a valid measurement instrument for cross-cultural analyses.

Following the initial reliability tests, and in addition to Cronbach's alpha coefficients, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values were computed for each construct to further confirm convergent validity. The CR values ranged between .82 and .91, and AVE values between .54 and .68, exceeding the recommended thresholds of .70 and .50 respectively (Hair et al., 2019). These indices indicate that the four-factor structure demonstrated satisfactory reliability and convergent validity across all country samples, supporting the construct's reliability and convergent validity within each cultural context.

In addition, separate CFAs were performed for each country sample to test cross-cultural comparability. The model fit indices indicated good and consistent fit across all contexts: USA (CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .050), Germany (CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .047), Japan (CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .049), and Türkiye (CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .046). These results confirm that the four-dimensional LWVS structure is stable and comparable across countries, thus supporting its cross-cultural measurement equivalence.

Table 1. Reliability Values of the LWVS (Cronbach's Alpha)

Value Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Instrumental	9	0.89
Social	9	0.87
Cognitive	6	0.84
Prestige	4	0.81

Descriptive Statistics

The demographic distributions of the sample by country are presented in Table 2. Accordingly, 25.2% of the participants were from the USA (n = 487), 23.9% from Germany (n = 463), 26.0% from Japan (n = 502), and 24.9% from

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Türkiye (n = 482). The age range was 18–26, with a mean age of 22. The gender distribution was balanced. Educational level was represented in four categories (high school, associate degree, bachelor's degree, and master's degree). The work experience variable was defined with a minimum threshold of one year, and the average job tenure was calculated as 3.8 years.

Table 2. Demographic Distribution of the Sample (n = 1.934)

	USA	**Germany**	**Japan**	**Türkiye**	**Total**
Number (n)	487	463	502	482	1.934
Gender					
Female (n/%)	254/52.2	241/52.2	262/52.2	251/52.1	1.008/52.1
Male (n/%)	233/47.8	222/47.9	240/47.8	231/47.9	926/47.9
Education Level					
High School	97/19.9	139/30	75/14.9	169/35.1	480/24.8
Associate Degree	122/25.1	162/35	100/19.9	145/30.1	529/27.4
Bachelor's Degree	219/45	139/30	276/55	145/30.1	779/40.3
Master's Degree	49/10.1	23/5	51/10.2	23/4.8	146/7.5
Age	23	22	21	22	22
Tenure	3.3	4.2	3.7	3.6	3.8

Note: The equivalents of educational levels in each country's system are as follows: USA (High School, Associate, Bachelor, Master/PhD), Germany (Abitur, Fachschule/Berufsakademie, Bachelor, Master/PhD), Japan (Kōtōgakkō, Tanki Daigaku, Daigaku, Shūshi/Hakase), Türkiye (High School, Vocational School of Higher Education [MYO], Bachelor, Master/Doctorate).

According to the country-based work value means presented in Table 3, the highest averages in instrumental values were observed in Japan (M = 4.51) and Türkiye (M = 4.52), while the lowest were found in the USA (M = 4.08) and Germany (M = 4.03). Cognitive values were at similar levels across all four countries (M ≈ 4.4). In social values, Japan (M = 4.54) and Türkiye (M = 4.45) stood out, whereas the USA (M = 3.98) and Germany (M = 3.90) showed lower averages. For prestige values, Japan (M = 4.21) and Türkiye (M = 4.03) scored higher, while the USA (M = 3.72) and Germany (M = 3.62) received lower scores.

Table 3. Country-Based Work Value Means (M, SD)

Value Dimension	**USA (n=487) M±SD**	**Germany (n=463) M±SD**	**Japan (n=502) M±SD**	**Türkiye (n=482) M±SD**
Instrumental	4.08 ± 0.8	4.03 ± 0.7	4.51 ± 0.8	4.52 ± 0.9
Social	4.44 ± 0.7	4.43 ± 0.7	4.48 ± 0.8	4.42 ± 0.7
Cognitive	3.98 ± 0.8	3.90 ± 0.8	4.54 ± 0.9	4.45 ± 0.8
Prestige	3.72 ± 0.8	3.62 ± 0.7	4.21 ± 0.8	4.03 ± 0.8

Cross-Country Differences

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was first conducted to examine the overall differences in work values across the four countries. The multivariate effect of country was significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.72$, $F(12, 5790) = 41.30$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$, indicating that national context exerted a substantial

influence on Generation Z's work values. Follow-up univariate analyses (ANOVA) revealed significant between-country differences in instrumental ($\eta^2 = .04$), social ($\eta^2 = .07$), and prestige ($\eta^2 = .05$) dimensions, while cognitive values showed no significant variation ($\eta^2 = .01$). Planned contrast analyses further confirmed that participants from collectivist cultures (Japan and Türkiye) reported significantly higher scores than those from individualist cultures (the USA and Germany) on instrumental, social, and prestige values ($p < .001$), whereas cognitive values remained statistically similar across all groups. Collectively, these results provide empirical support for the coexistence of convergence and divergence processes—convergence in cognitive orientations reflecting shared generational features, and divergence in material, relational, and prestige-related orientations reflecting enduring cultural differences (see Table 4 for summary results).

Table 4. Summary of Between-Country Effects on Work Values (MANOVA, ANOVA, and Planned Contrasts)

Test/Value Dimension	Statistic	df	F / t	p	η^2 (partial)	Interpretation
MANOVA (overall effect)	Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.72$	(12, 5790)	$F = 41.30$	< .001	.18	Significant multivariate effect of country on work values
Instrumental	$F (3, 1930) = 28.50$	3	28.50	< .001	.04	Significant cross-country difference
	Contrast: Collectivist (JP+TR) > Individualist (US+DE)	–	$t = 6.80$	< .001	–	Higher instrumental values in collectivist cultures
Social	$F (3, 1930) = 46.20$	3	46.20	< .001	.07	Significant cross-country difference
	Contrast: Collectivist > Individualist	–	$t = 8.90$	< .001	–	Higher social values in collectivist cultures
Cognitive	$F (3, 1930) = 1.20$	3	1.20	.31	.01	No significant cross-country difference (convergence)
	Contrast: Collectivist vs. Individualist	–	$t = 0.90$	.37	–	Non-significant
Prestige	$F (3, 1930) = 32.70$	3	32.70	< .001	.05	Significant cross-country difference
	Contrast: Collectivist > Individualist	–	$t = 7.10$	< .001	–	Higher prestige values in collectivist cultures

Note: All reported η^2 values represent partial eta squared estimates, consistent with conventional reporting standards for MANOVA and ANOVA (Field, 2018).

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Supplementary Analyses

Correlations Among Value Dimensions

To determine the relationships among the four value dimensions, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. The correlation analyses showed that there are positive and significant relationships among the value dimensions (Table 5). In particular, a strong relationship was found between instrumental values and prestige values ($r = .51$, $p < .01$), while a moderate relationship was observed between cognitive values and social values ($r = .48$, $p < .01$).

Table 5. Correlations Among Work Value Dimensions (n = 1,934)

Value Dimension	Instrumental	Social	Cognitive	Prestige
Instrumental	-	.42**	.46**	.51**
Social	.42**	-	.48**	.39**
Cognitive	.46**	.48**	-	.44**
Prestige	.51**	.39**	.44**	-

Note: Correlations are Pearson's r. $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Demographic Control Analyses (ANCOVA)

In addition to the effect of country, the effects of demographic variables on value dimensions were evaluated by including age and work experience as covariates, and gender and education level as fixed factors in the model. When demographic variables were added to the model, the effect of country remained significant for instrumental, social, and prestige values (Table 6). Furthermore, education level ($F = 9.1$, $p < .001$) and age ($F = 5.8$, $p = .02$) showed significant effects on cognitive values. Work experience created small but significant differences in instrumental ($F = 3.9$, $p = .02$) and prestige ($F = 4.2$, $p = .01$) values. The effect of gender was not found to be significant in any dimension.

Table 6. ANCOVA Results (Country + Effects of Demographic Variables)

Value Dimension	Country Effect (*F*, *p*)	Age (*F*, *p*)	Experience (*F*, *p*)	Gender (*F*, *p*)	Education Level (*F*, *p*)
Instrumental	21.9, <.01	2.3, .12	3.9, .02	1.7, .19	4.6, .01
Social	1.0, .39	5.8, .02	2.5, .08	0.9, .34	9.1 < .001
Cognitive	39.6, < .001	1.5, .21	3.1, .04	2.2, .14	3.8, .02
Prestige	27.2, < .001	1.1, .29	4.2, .01	2.0, .15	3.3, .03

Effects of Demographic Predictors (Regression Analysis)

The regression analysis results presented in Table 7 showed that education level was the strongest predictor of cognitive values ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$). Age significantly predicted cognitive values ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$), while work experience significantly predicted instrumental ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$) and prestige ($\beta = .10$, $p < .01$)

values. Gender did not have a significant effect on any of the dimensions. The explanatory power of the demographic variables was limited (R^2 = .05–.09); this indicates that value orientations are primarily determined by the cultural context.

Table 7. Predictive Effects of Demographic Variables on Work Values (Standardized β Coefficients)

Dependent Variable	Age (β)	Experience (β)	Gender (β)	Education (β)	R^2
Instrumental	.05	.09*	-.03	.12**	.06
Social	.11**	.04	.02	.18***	.09
Cognitive	.07	.08*	-.04	.10**	.05
Prestige	.06	.10**	-.02	.09*	.07

Note: Standardized β coefficients are reported. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

4. Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to provide empirical evidence as to whether cultural convergence or divergence is more dominant in the work values of Generation Z within the framework of the global generation paradigm. Data obtained from four country samples—the USA, Germany, Japan, and Türkiye—revealed that both cultural convergence and divergence are present in Generation Z's work values.

The general hypothesis of the study (H_1)—Generation Z's work values are similar across countries in certain dimensions, while in others they differ significantly depending on cultural differences—was largely supported by the findings. In particular, no significant cross-cultural difference was observed in cognitive values, supporting the convergence thesis advanced by the global generation paradigm. In contrast, significant differences were found among countries in instrumental, social, and prestige values, which is consistent with the divergence patterns described by Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory and the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004). Thus, the general hypothesis was accepted, showing that both cultural similarities and cultural differences coexist simultaneously in the value orientations of Generation Z.

The first hypothesis of the study (H_{1a}) —Generation Z's instrumental work values (financial gain, job security) differ across countries depending on economic conditions—was confirmed. The findings show that instrumental values (salary, job security, benefits) are more highly prioritized in Japan and Türkiye compared to the USA and Germany. This pattern is consistent with Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory, as under conditions of economic and institutional uncertainty, individuals place greater importance on security and extrinsic rewards to prevent resource loss. At the same time, Hofstede's (2001) uncertainty avoidance dimension also supports this finding: in countries such as Türkiye and Japan, where uncertainty avoidance scores are high, individuals' expectations for job security, stability, and institutional guarantees are higher. Similarly, Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, and Kai-Cheng (1997) in

their research on Asian and Western cultures demonstrated that economic and cultural contexts shape managerial values, while Schwartz (1999) found that instrumental motivations in cultural value orientations vary significantly depending on context. More recently, Münz & Mascena's (2024) Brazil–Germany comparison of Gen Z also reported that instrumental values (especially expectations regarding salary and security) differ significantly between countries. These results also align with Duffy et al.'s (2016) findings that young employees seek greater material security during periods of economic instability.

The second hypothesis of the study (H_{1b}) —Generation Z's cognitive values (learning, development, creativity) are similar across different countries—was confirmed. The findings revealed that cognitive values such as learning, development, and creativity were emphasized at similar levels across the four countries. This result is consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which argues that individuals are inherently oriented toward goals such as learning, autonomy, and competence, which represent universal psychological needs. At the same time, the Global Generation Paradigm proposed by Edmunds and Turner (2005) suggests that digitalization and global information flows bring Generation Z's cognitive orientations together in a cross-cultural common ground. Empirical findings also support this view: in their study examining samples from China, Thailand, Germany, and the Netherlands, de Boer et al. (2021) found that cognitive values were highly prioritized in every context. This indicates that Generation Z demonstrates a strong common orientation toward cognitive domains independent of national cultures. Similarly, de Boer & Bordoloi's (2022) cross-cultural research on samples from China, Germany, the Netherlands, and Thailand revealed limited global convergence in Gen Z's work values. The study found that only values related to learning and visible results were consistently prioritized across countries, while other work values varied significantly depending on national contexts. This finding demonstrates that cognitive values (learning and development) possess universal appeal regardless of culture, whereas instrumental, social, and prestige values are predominantly shaped by cultural differences. Therefore, the convergence observed in cognitive values and the divergence observed in other dimensions in our study strongly align with the findings of de Boer & Bordoloi (2022), confirming the existence of a hybrid pattern.

The third hypothesis of the study (H_{1c}) —Generation Z's social values differ between individualist and collectivist cultures—was confirmed. The findings showed that in collectivist societies such as Japan and Türkiye, social values (relationships with colleagues, group harmony, belonging) are given greater importance, whereas in individualist societies such as the USA and Germany, they are relatively less emphasized. This result is directly consistent with Hofstede's (2001) individualism–collectivism dimension: while group harmony and community ties are prioritized in collectivist cultures, independence and autonomy are emphasized in individualist cultures. Furthermore, within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the emphasis on the universal need for belonging, but with its fulfillment varying by cultural context, theoretically

supports the findings. Looking at empirical evidence in the literature, De Boer & Bordoloi's (2022) comparative study across four countries reported that, aside from "learning," many of Gen Z's work values differ by culture, with national contexts being particularly decisive in social relationships and group harmony. However, some findings in the literature partially overlap with our hypothesis. For example, in their study conducted in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Dokoupilová et al. (2024) found that Gen Z prioritized social values such as Benevolence and Universalism; although these countries are classified as relatively individualist according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, social values were still strongly emphasized. This finding suggests that social values may be highly prioritized not only in collectivist contexts but also in individualist ones, indicating that there may be not only cultural differences but also a universal orientation in social values. Similarly, Aldjić & Farrell's (2022) study of Austrian Gen Z showed that even in a relatively individualist cultural context, young people prioritized intrinsic and social rewards. This result is consistent with our finding that social values are higher in collectivist societies but also reveals that such values continue to be important in individualist contexts, indicating that the H_{1c} hypothesis may point to a partially universal tendency.

The fourth hypothesis of the study (H_{1d})—Generation Z's prestige values are higher in collectivist cultures—was confirmed. Our findings show that prestige values (status, recognition, social acknowledgment) are higher in Japan and Türkiye compared to the USA and Germany. This result is consistent with the Value–Belief–Norm (VBN) theory put forward by Stern et al. (1999), as in collectivist contexts, social norms and social recognition play a stronger role in shaping individuals' value orientations. Moreover, Hofstede's (2001) power distance dimension also suggests that sensitivity to hierarchy reinforces prestige values. This finding is further supported by recent literature. For example, Münz and Mascena's (2024) Brazil–Germany comparative study demonstrated that Gen Z exhibited cultural differences in prestige and instrumental values, with greater emphasis on status and visible achievement in more collectivist contexts such as Brazil. Similarly, in the Austrian sample studied by Aldjić & Farrell (2022), intrinsic and social rewards were more prominent among Gen Z's work values, while prestige values were relatively lower, indicating that this dimension is less prioritized in individualist contexts. However, there are also findings in the recent literature that question the universal validity of this hypothesis. For example, in an analysis of the US Gen Z sample, Bierbrier (2022) found that prestige values ranked not first but behind instrumental values. Likewise, in their cross-cultural study across four countries, De Boer & Bordoloi (2021/2022) found that prestige values were among the least prioritized by participants. These findings suggest that prestige may not always be a primary motivational source, not only in individualist contexts but occasionally in collectivist ones as well, indicating that H_{1d} points to conditional validity.

These findings not only contribute to understanding Generation Z's value system but also show how the global generation paradigm interacts with cultural variations. The shared experiences of Generation Z shaped by global digital media,

social networks, and international education channels have created a universal convergence trend, especially in cognitive values (learning, development, search for meaning). This supports the convergence approach (Edmunds & Turner, 2005; Tapscott, 2009), which argues that digitalization can generate cross-cultural similarities among generations. However, this convergence did not extend to all value dimensions; values such as instrumental (financial gain, job security), social (collegiality, belonging), and prestige (status, recognition) are still shaped in distinct ways within national and cultural contexts. This shows that the divergence approach also remains valid and that culture continues to exert a determining influence on value systems.

These findings also resonate with the broader youth globalization literature, which conceptualizes young people as both products and agents of global cultural flows (Feixa et al., 2016; Threadgold, 2018). From this perspective, Generation Z's shared cognitive orientations reflect the emergence of a transnational "youth habitus" shaped by global media and digital communication, while persistent cultural differences in instrumental and social values illustrate the continued salience of local moral economies. Hence, the pattern observed in this study aligns with the argument that globalization does not erase cultural boundaries but transforms how they are negotiated within generational experiences.

The two-way variance analyses conducted in the study provided an opportunity to examine how gender differences interact with national contexts. The findings revealed that gender had no independent effect on the four main value dimensions (instrumental, cognitive, social, prestige) and that the country × gender interaction was also not statistically significant. This result indicates that gender plays a limited role in shaping value orientations and that cultural context does not alter this effect. However, the analyses showed that other demographic variables, such as age, education level, and work experience, had statistically significant effects on some value dimensions, though their explanatory power remained limited (R^2 = .05–.09). This demonstrates that cultural context, rather than demographic characteristics, is more decisive in shaping Generation Z's work values.

Similar results are also observed in the literature. For example, Judge and Bretz (1992) and Lyons & Kuron (2014) found that the effects of gender on work values are limited, with cultural or structural factors playing a much more dominant role in most cases. Likewise, Ng et al. (2010), in their research on young employees, showed that gender differences do not produce consistent and strong patterns in work values, and that individual differences are more strongly explained by factors such as education level and generational effects. Therefore, the absence of an independent and significant effect of gender in this study is consistent with existing literature, confirming that Generation Z's value orientations are essentially shaped by cultural context and generational identity.

Overall, the main hypothesis (H_1) formulated at the beginning of the study was largely supported. The findings revealed that Generation Z's work values

demonstrate cross-cultural similarities in some dimensions (particularly cognitive values), while significant cultural differences persist in others (instrumental, social, and prestige values). Thus, while each of the H_{1a}–H_{1d} hypotheses was supported in its own context, taken together, the study shows that Generation Z's value orientations are shaped by the simultaneous interaction of "convergence" and "divergence" processes.

The findings can also be associated with the concept of crossvergence in the literature. This concept, introduced by Ralston et al. (1997), refers to new value patterns arising from the interaction of cultural divergence and global convergence. From this perspective, the fact that Generation Z demonstrates cross-cultural similarities in some value dimensions while remaining tied to local norms in others points not only to the simultaneous presence of convergence and divergence but also to a hybrid value structure emerging from the synthesis of these two processes. Therefore, the conceptualization of "simultaneous convergence and divergence" used in this study intersects with the crossvergence literature and brings into focus the applicability of this framework to generational research.

While this study conceptualizes convergence and divergence as simultaneous processes, it is important to recognize that simultaneity may operate unevenly across value dimensions. Cognitive values—related to learning, creativity, and meaning—appear to converge globally due to shared digital and educational ecosystems, whereas instrumental and social values remain anchored in national-cultural structures. This layered simultaneity suggests that convergence and divergence may coexist not within identical domains but across interdependent value levels. In this sense, the "hybrid model" proposed here should be understood as a stratified rather than homogeneous simultaneity, reflecting the differentiated effects of globalization on distinct value dimensions.

Nevertheless, the assumption of a "global generation" must be approached with caution. Digital access, educational opportunities, and socioeconomic capital remain unevenly distributed both within and between countries (Van Dijk, 2020). As such, not all members of Generation Z participate equally in global digital networks or share the same degree of cosmopolitan exposure. This structural asymmetry implies that the global generation paradigm is more representative of digitally privileged groups, whereas young people from less connected or lower-income backgrounds may experience limited inclusion in global value exchanges. Recognizing these inequalities adds a critical dimension to interpreting the patterns of convergence and divergence identified in this study.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study demonstrate that the approaches of global value convergence and cultural divergence are not mutually exclusive paradigms; rather, when it comes to Generation Z's work values, they are complementary processes that can coexist simultaneously. The results show that some orientations, such as cognitive values, are similarly emphasized across different cultures through

digitalization, global media, and education systems, thereby supporting the core assumption of the global generation paradigm regarding cross-cultural similarities. On the other hand, the significant cultural differences observed in other value dimensions—such as instrumental, social, and prestige—reveal that Generation Z is shaped not only within a digital universality but also within the framework of local historical, economic, and cultural codes.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its adoption of a holistic approach that does not exclude cultural context when analyzing Generation Z's work values but also avoids reducing value orientations solely to cultural determinism. In this regard, the four-dimensional work values model (instrumental, cognitive, social, prestige) developed by Lyons et al. (2010) was tested across different cultural contexts, and its universal validity was examined. The findings revealed the existence of a cross-cultural commonality particularly in the cognitive values dimension. This result both confirms the applicability of the scale across different country samples and provides an important contribution to understanding how generation-based value orientations may be shaped independently of cultural filters. Furthermore, the study tested Edmunds & Turner's (2005) global generation paradigm within a cross-cultural comparative framework, demonstrating that this theoretical approach operates not as a one-dimensional convergence model but as a hybrid structure encompassing simultaneous convergence and divergence.

The conceptualization of "simultaneous convergence and divergence" used in this study bears similarities to the crossvergence approach introduced by Ralston et al. (1997) but also diverges from it. While crossvergence refers to the creation of a new value system arising from the interaction of cultural divergence and global convergence, the conceptualization proposed in this study emphasizes the simultaneous presence of both convergence and divergence processes. Thus, this approach expands upon the existing concept and adapts it specifically to the context of generational research.

In terms of practical contributions, the findings of this study provide strategic implications for human resource management, leadership, career planning, and organizational culture design. The prioritization of cognitive values (learning, development, meaning) and social values (collaboration, belonging, team spirit) by Generation Z requires organizations to develop meaning-centered job designs, personalized development opportunities, and participatory, team-oriented work models for this generation. Particularly in contexts with high levels of uncertainty avoidance, such as Türkiye and Japan, instrumental values (financial gain, job security) and prestige-oriented expectations (status, recognition) are more sensitive; therefore, security-based policies, fair reward systems, and career paths that support social recognition become critical.

The findings also revealed that the country variable had strong and significant effects on work values, whereas the gender variable did not show an independent effect. The interaction between country and gender was also not

statistically significant. This indicates that value orientations are essentially shaped by cultural context, while gender is not a determining factor. For multinational enterprises, this finding points to the importance of human resource policies that are sensitive primarily to cultural differences while at the same time upholding the principle of gender equality.

Accordingly, it is important to develop more targeted strategies in human resource practices. For example, training and development programs that emphasize learning, creativity, and personal growth should be designed to support the importance placed on cognitive values. In terms of work arrangements, flexible and hybrid models adapted to the cultural characteristics of countries may enhance Generation Z's job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Moreover, reward systems should be differentiated to highlight individual achievement in individualist societies, while in collectivist societies they should emphasize belonging and prestige. Ultimately, the proposed strategic approach is a "hybrid strategic human resource model" that is culturally flexible yet does not overlook the universal orientations of Generation Z. This model is essential both for achieving global competitive advantage and for strengthening local workforce engagement.

This research has several limitations. First, the analysis was limited to four countries (the USA, Germany, Japan, and Türkiye); therefore, the generalizability of the findings is constrained. Future studies should include less-represented cultural contexts such as Africa, the Middle East, or South America. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which makes it impossible to track the evolution of values over time. Longitudinal research could better capture changes in generational values. Third, the data were collected through self-reports, which may be subject to factors such as social desirability bias. Mixed-method approaches and qualitative interviews could reveal the deeper meanings and cultural codes behind values. In addition, linking values not only to cognitive dimensions but also to behavioral outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, turnover intention) would strengthen the theoretical power of the model. Finally, the conceptualization of "simultaneous convergence and divergence" employed in this study describes a hybrid pattern in which Generation Z's value orientations contain both cross-cultural similarities and cultural specificities simultaneously. However, this expression is not yet an established concept in the literature and is therefore open to critique. When compared to alternative concepts such as crossvergence (Ralston et al., 1997), which are frequently used in convergence–divergence debates, the proposed approach has the potential to provide a more explanatory framework, though it remains a conceptual initiative that requires further theoretical development. In this regard, our study introduces this conceptualization to the literature as a conceptual proposal, and future research should test and refine this approach in different contexts.

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