POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN GENERATION Y: A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

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Abstract

Millennials also known as generation Y (born within 1980-2000) are actively in pursuit of taking charge of their surroundings. Their presence now prevails from business to social, political and professional environment. Recent research on generation Y shows that in number of cases they have been found to exhibit a unique behavioral commonality of political activism in which they have been observed to actively participate in change movements to correct the situations against their interests. This behavior is emerging to be a very critical factor around the world and it provokes a need to understand how this generation makes sense of the work, minimum acceptable standards and their preferences in terms of selecting and staying within a specific business, social and political organization. It implies that the organizations both political and business have to understand this generation and its emerging behavior of political activism and shape up their employer brand proposition accordingly in order to attract and retain and satisfy them. This paper is opting a stance of critical realist and substantiates upon the latest reported facts in number of countries including Pakistan, United Kingdom, United States of America, Chile, Malaysia, Quebec, Turkey and Hong Kong to propose that this behavioral commonality of political activism is a global phenomenon. This research concludes that the proposition is valid and holds a very significant value for the business and political organizations for the formation of employer brand and utilizing this knowledge help them in employer brand development for attracting and retaining generation Y.

Keywords: Employer Brand, Generation Y, Political Activism, Globalization.

JEL Classification: Z000

Introduction

The urge of developing a strong employer brand is linked with a deeper understanding of its various underlined dimensions (i.e. attractiveness dimension and competency dimension). These dimensions contain factors that are subjected to the perceived preference patterns further leading towards behavioral manifestations. One of the factor is emerging nature of study and is considered to

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be as critical is political activism for it’s witnessed multiple simultaneous recurrences around the globe in generation Y. Generation Y currently cascaded in the age bracket of 19 and 39 is ready to prove their vitality in social, political and business organizations (Morin & Taylor, 2009; Oh, Yong, Sarwar, Low, & Vinayan, 2019; Shiratuddin et al., 2016). It makes it pivotal for the respective organizations to understand their significance, recognize their potential and reconsider the power of this generation. Beside the diversity among them in so many ways they have recently been witnessed of having reliably conflicting behavioral manifestations (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008; Pînzaru et al., 2016). However, the clustered commonality also revealed that they have significant similarity when it comes to the behavior of political activism in this generation. Political activism has been defined by David (2007) as an activity including organizing, petitioning, protesting at lobbying in reaction to any action taken by an individual, or group of people”. The recent research by Morin and Taylor (2009) also shows that this generation is much more sensitive and politically active when it comes to religion, society and organizational practices while making the decisions about joining or leaving any particular group of people. This lucrative participation of this generation at various forums is currently and will in future have significant impact on the society at large especially on political and business organizations. It is evident that the behavior of political activism in not only limited to male population but female population is also exhibiting it. These activist are not born rather they are the product of rational organizational contexts formed via civic links (Norris, 2007).

This research pools up the same knowledge from the overlapping areas of organizational behavior, social activism and political science for the formation of a proposed model, which highlights that the generation Y, is exhibiting a common behavioral manifestation of political activism. This study is also establishing the fact that under the contemporary situation of globalization this model application is valid globally. Rooting in the premises the study is aimed at highlighting few propositions, which are later analyzed critically, based on the evidences from real life cases from the various parts of the world. These evidences on one hand are differentiating the behavior of generation Y from previous generations and on the other hand are showing the universality of behavioral commonality of political activism in this generation.

This research highlights the behavioral commonalities based on the cases of the different regions of the world which strength the logical application of generational frame around the globe. Hence, the research also adds value in the field of generational studies and its application in various fields of such as in the fields of marketing, branding, organizational behavior, social and political science. This research will also provide in-depth insights to the stakeholders for understanding the phenomenon in better way and later for learn about its drivers with finally devising the strategies to substantiate this knowledge to extract benefit.

As the nature of the work is interpretive, the study has taken the stance of critical idealist. This stance has taken because of the involvement of rigorous phenomenological examination and the examination of its priori synthetic elements for understanding and experiencing the phenomenon
thoroughly. This leads further to the core of the study that is to establish enough evidence to substantiate the proposition that political activism is a global phenomenon. It leads to the main research question of this study: is the behavioral manifestation of political activism in generation Y a global phenomenon?. Which further leads to the core research propositions:

\(P1\): Generation Y is exhibiting the behavioral commonality of political activism. The above proposition leads to the main proposition

From the above proposition, this research establishes the core proposition: 
\(P2\): Generation Y is more politically active globally.

**Research Method**

This study has taken the stance of critical idealist in the formation of its theoretical model (given in the Fig. 1 below) for analysis and discussion of the substantiate evidence in the form of globally published research and media reports.

![Conceptual Model](image)

**Figure 1:** Conceptual Model

The subsequent part constitutes the main operationalization of the concepts including the operational definitions of the variables presented in the conceptual model.

**Behavior**

There are various methods and frameworks used by the researchers in order to understand and explain the behavioral manifestations. The logic behind is to understand the antecedents of certain behaviors as to what actually leads towards a certain type of behavior. So finally it reaches at to point
of anticipation and somehow control it for example the framework of personality type has been used in order to relate certain type of personality traits with certain behaviors and circularly what type of behavior lead to the formation of certain type of personality. Here the notion of what causes what rather circular (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hines, Hungerford, & Tomera, 1987; Judge & Bono, 2001; Rodriguez, Boyer, Fleming, & Cohen, 2019).

However, this research has used the generational framework to explain the origin, rationale and directional dependence of specific type of behavioral manifestation of political activism (Muskat & Reitsamer, 2019; Solomon, Russell-Bennett, & Previte, 2012).

**Generational Frame**

The segmentation of generations is primarily originated from USA based on the year of the birth as shown in Fig 2 and this frame was later found useful in its application in other parts of the world (Macky et al., 2008). However, the deeper encapsulating complexities which actually differentiates these generations are the major political, social, technological and economical incidents happened during and before that time span, finally leading towards the formation of unique and universal behavioral manifestations in the people belonging to that generation (Alestalo, 2010; Anantatmula & Shrivastav, 2012; Appel-Meulenbroek, Vosters, Kemperman, & Arentze, 2019; Dries, Pepermans, & De Kerpel, 2008). It involves adopting and adapting to the general environmental factors leading to the wider formulation from how people live in general toward how society moves and globally effecting each aspect such as trade, politics and social life etc. (Macky et al., 2008).

**Table 1**

**Generational Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Birth year</th>
<th>Significant events</th>
<th>General values</th>
<th>Values in Work</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>1922-1945</td>
<td>Great Depression, World war II</td>
<td>Conformism</td>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Value of experience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Value of per-severance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thrift</td>
<td>Security(stability)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Idealism</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Value of contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Workaholic</td>
<td>Bonus and other incentives</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>Criticism</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Innovativeness</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self- fulfillment</td>
<td>Advancement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>1946-1964</td>
<td>Moon Landing, Restructuring of Society, Economic Prosperity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Roaring sixties, Yuppie-culture in 80’s-foundation of business world</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table Continued...)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>1965-1979</td>
<td>Part of welfare state, Depression, Education opportunities, Aids, Technology usage, Divorce rate, Independence, Practicality, Non-hierarchical structure, Loyalty, Time-off as incentive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Y</td>
<td>1980-2000</td>
<td>Fall of the Berlin Wall, MTV, Internet, Digi, 9/11-War on, Death of Princess Diana, Adoring Parents, Collectivism, Passion, Learning, Security-Not stability, Willingness to work, Ambitiousness, Lower need for social approval, Innovation, Monetary gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Z</td>
<td>2001-</td>
<td>Great depression started in 2008-No luxury or economic safety, Experience-based learning, individualism, Networking, Diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adopted from (Dries et al., 2008; Anantatmula & Shrivastav, 2012; Alestalo, 2010; Geck, 2007)

This generational classification originally based on the year of birth and the shaped up behaviors mentioned are mostly related to the population of USA but the model has been generalized keeping its source format of classification. (Judge & Bono, 2001).

**Generation Y**

The year of birth for the people falling in this generation ranges from 1979 to 2000 (Marconi, 2001; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). This generation have practically seen relatively stable geographic environment such as least warfare and their predecessor generations such as generation X and baby boomers have provided most of their life necessities. however, generation Y have seen technological revolutions especially in the fields IT, mobile and artificial intelligence. The communication has become so easy, quick and vast that world is now virtually merging into a
big global village. The cultures, ethnicities and rituals are embracing each other people connecting so rapidly, trends and information spreading so fast and unanimously that has not been witnessed ever before. This is acting as one of the principle reason in shaping up the globally similar behavioral manifestations of groups around the world. Based on the availability of vast range of information and opportunities beyond comprehension this generation has developed a set of unique behaviors which differentiates them from previous generations (Muskat & Reitsamer, 2019). According to literature this generation is more impatient and is more eager to get opportunities. They are more demanding from their employers and would not take no for an answer (Dries et al., 2008; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Lyons, Cude, Gutter, & Lawrence, 2003). They have very low patience for the inequality and unacceptable unethical and illegal practices and have courage to come out to speak about it act on what they believe and are very active in terms of political activism.

**Political Activism**

The research on political activism do not only highlights the notion and its application but it also explains the cases where the people actually demonstrated it to communicate their agendas (Norris, 2007). It was conceptually originated from the work of various researchers including (Verba & Almond, 1963; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978; Verba, Nie, & Row, 1972), and Barnes et al. (1979). In 1980s the work was principally done to understand its theoretical underpinnings and the philosophical assumptions leading to the survey based research. However, it was in 1990s that the notion was further developed and analyzed scientifically. It was later in 2000s when the major themes of this notions were highlighted in the work on Norris (2007):

i. The institutional perspective of the resolution held in reserve for election turnout becoming increasing important and having an increased approval;

ii. Consequences of declining tendency to become a member in the democratic settings;

iii. Political association having inclination towards social capitalism getting increased acceptance for adhocism; and

iv. An increasing tendency towards cause based activism having diversity of agendas including environmental, social, political, professional agendas.

The concept of political activism was further evolved due to the technological advancement, elevated social life style, increased rate of literacy, increase in the number of available medias spreading information and creating awareness, increased understanding of basic human rights and vast interconnectivity of people from different parts of the globe, communication ease and a lot of other similar factors (Martin & justice, 2007; Roberts, 2004).
Despite its wide range of application in almost all fields of life, in order to make the concept parsimonious the contemporary study is presenting the evidences from education industry. The cases highlighted in the study highlights the presence of certain age group their resistance towards forced and unacceptable policies and practices and their political activism in terms of protest to make sure they get what they feel is right. Here the conjecture of this though of political activism is accelerated in three stages. At first stage there is a strong expression of unique individual level of beliefs based of what they have learned and are inspired from. The second stage is when they refuse to blindly obey the authorities. And at the third and final stage they come to act against them in the form of protest in order to correct those actions, policies and procedures. This become even more pertinent to activism due to paced sharing of information encouraging other mobs to act accordingly (Norris, 2007).

One of the remarkable fact about political activism is that current political systems specifically democratic systems are somehow the outcome of its consequences. It can be said that the system have to contain political activism as its rout in order to bring about the required change in the political systems (Norris, 2007). The same activism can be viewed in the current scenario all over the globe where generation Y is recognizing its potential and participating actively in changing the system which are obsolete or unacceptable to bring political systems on its place. The same is happening in other cases such as in business where the same activism is pushing organizations to live in accordance with the society and mostly consider what this generation consider to be good and bad (Norris, 2007; Smith, Fressoli, & Thomas, 2014).

Globalization

The times have changed people living in silos have been connected to form a bigger picture of human evolution and globalization have played it vital part in its advancement (Hines et al., 1987). The windows of opportunities opened all around the globe have also created an understanding of other cultures their respective geographic limitation and the possibilities there wider reach of opportunities have provided (Robbins et al., 2013). People tend to not only comprehend each other, learn from each other but also have started to share the comparable behavioral manifestation given the same reach of exposure they have to the vast world of information. They are forming inspirations standing tall and sure of what they believe and are ready to take part and to actively change the surrounding for good. This when considered in generational perspective have shown that generation Y all around the world are exhibiting similar behavioral patterns (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

Interrelationship of Employer Brand, Generation Y, Behavior, Globalization and Political Activism

One of the major challenges organizations are facing these days are that the previous generations are getting retires and are leaving their workplace for new generations to takeover. And the emerging scenarios is that the work place is comprised of mixed generations working under the same roof. These are not just people of different age groups rather they are people with different
set of beliefs and people with different level of exposures to the overall scenarios of their time and space (Economist, 2008). This makes them comfortable with relatively different set of working behaviors, policies and procedures (Foot & Stoffman, 1998). For example, one generation can be very comfortable with working extra times and another may seem it otherwise. Similarly, one generation may find it ok to work on the same designation and concerned more about retirement and another generation may not accept lack of promotional opportunities and may not plan to stick within same organization years after year. The point here is to understand that there are different generations with different work related behaviors and expectation in the job.

Globalization have also played a very critical role in formation of these behaviors people at same work place may have diversity in terms of gender, races, political believes, nationalities, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. This makes it even harder for management to keep everything under control. Globalization have a diverse workforce with relatively new knowledgebase, new set of skills and better rates but have posed a challenges of managing all under same rooftop. Now linking the notion of generational frame the study have proposed that even within all these bases of diversities there are overlapping similitary among the people of these generation as they have been found to have developed al the postulates of political activism they are having there learning strengths and inspiration, they are better aware about their rights and they don’t accept any incompatible policies and procedure and eventually they take against actions to correct any actions, policies and procedures against their personal, social, environmental, economic, political, national, global and religious interest (Anantatmula & Shrivastav, 2012).

The latest research on the beliefs and preference patterns of generation y in terms of politics have revealed that this generation have a grave importance because of their increasing interest and participation in political activity making them a very significant political asst. this generation is having very high tendency towards establishing the social and political recovery and is not hesitated taking about the liberty of human rights. This generation is very active and is ready for serving. They do not take an order just for the sakes of obedience they do not take no for an answer and they don’t only recognize their rights and their power but they also pursuit to establish a fare system and act against the policies and procedures they seem unfit.

The influential capacity of this generation was also seen during American elections where the candidate name Barack Obama came out as a promising figure with an understanding of this generations issues, taking simple mottos and satisfying their dreams. It was marvelous how this young generation completely rearranged and moved the whole political scenario.

The generation Y in Malaysia also showed a significant affiliation with political activism. They are more eager than that of their previous generations. Although there have spread in all shades but they have been seen to have more inclination towards liberal qualities in the system.
Empirical Evidences of Political Activism in Gen Y

There are a lot of media reports and substantial literature evidence on the phenomenon of generation Y being politically active. Here are some of the major pragmatic evidences from different geographic regions of the world, e.g. Pakistan, Turkey, Hong Kong, Quebec, UK, USA, and Chile etc. in supporting core proposition on this work.

Pakistani media have witnessed and reported that right from the start of the new millennium the young generation from the Pakistani population has taken keen interest in political and social activities. The stats in table number 2 are exhibiting that the participation of Pakistani young population has been resulted into progressive increase in the voting turnout from 43.07% to way above 50% especially exceeding 55% till 2013 and have witnessed highest participation exhibiting the highest level of political activism in last four decades:

Table 2
Voting Turnout in Pakistan

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>43.07%</td>
<td>45.46%</td>
<td>40.28%</td>
<td>35.42%</td>
<td>41.08%</td>
<td>44.23%</td>
<td>55.02%</td>
<td>51.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Pakistan has been facing a series of protest and long march on the road to the capital city from opposition right from 2013 elections by the opposing parties against the ruling party mentioning there alleged rigging in the process of 2013 elections. Although both parties have different political image as one party is considered to more of liberal and another party is considered to be more of conservative, still there are two commonly shared similarities in both of the parties: (i) the participation level of young generation or the people belonging to age group of generation Y has been very high, and (ii) more women participation than ever before. Although the women population is higher in Pakistan however due to the male dominating social culture and various local factors the women have not been given right to participate freely and more than that majority of the vote bank of women are controlled by the respective male family or social leaders with their consent and will. So it was rather unusual to have witness such high level of women participation. The overwhelming participation and political activism led to the selection of the liberal party in the election 2018 also depicting that this generation is not only political active but very persistent.

“Umbrella Revolution” in September 2014, led by – Joshua Wong – a young man no even reached his fifties has been proven to be the most iconic political main stream activity in the Hong Kong history. Another major turning point has been witnessed in Hong Kong in the form of a movement “Occupy Central” in 2017 elections against the decision of Beijing not allowing candidates open nominations (Avsaroglu, 2014). This movement was also led by the group of college students.
belonging to age group of generation Y.

A serious political stance has been witness in turkey in 2013 against the government. The Gezi Park Protests turned out to be a nationwide assault of the youth of turkey against the government decisions about center renovation plan because they found it against the national interest of Turkey. It was reported by the survey (report, 2014) that age of 31% of the people in protest was from 21 to 25 and 31% was 26 to 30 years. The protest and actions in terms of Beyoğlu and the Taksim development taken by the youth generation Y was later recognized by the court and it resulted into the reversal of the decisions taken by the government.

Another anti-capitalist movement namely “Occupy Wall Street” was held in 2011 in USA. According to reports the people who initiated and taken on the movement through social media belonged to the age group of generation Y(occupywallst.org, 2014). However, with its growth the more people from other age groups also pooled.

In 2012, Quebec also faced a protest taken on principally by the people belonging to generation Y against the government for raising up the bar of tuition fee of university (Winograd & Hais, 2014). Further, the protest against governmental decision grew larger at a scale where it eventually pushed government to reverse the decision proving the significance of this generation and the core proposition of political activism in generation Y.

The similar challenge was also faced by UK in 2012 when its youth got out on streets particularly belonging to this generation Y protesting against the government decision of raising the tuition fee. The youth belonging to generation why gathered in the form of mob well exceeding the number of 10000 on the streets of London to protest against this fee raise and for the increasing rate of unemployment. The government very tactfully managed to handle the situation given their political pressure (Wagner, 2014). Here the important notion is not to see who won the protest and ho didn’t the important point is to note that the people belonging to this generation are very politically active and are not tolerant for any injustice and incompatible policies made by business, political or social organizations or even governing authorities.

In 2011, the Chilean student’s mob came out protesting against their government and against the educational governing bodies demanding a change in old educational framework. The protest eventually was recognized by the governing authorities and a lot of respective changes were incorporated as per the demands. The protest then turned further into political movement impacting at presidential level and played a significant role in drastic fall down of approval rating of the ex-Chilean President Sebastian Pinera’s.

Apart from the political organizations, consumers and employees from all over the world are exhibiting political activism joining gathered to support youth-led mobilization effort (2019) to
bring attention to the climate crisis. According to a research by Global Tolerance (2019), 62% of generation Y wants to work only for the business organizations who are contributing positively in the environment and society. This Swedish led political activism act have led to expression of worldwide political activism against the brands like Cadbury chocolate and resulting into closure of 100s of outlets of the brands like starbucks and walk out of 1000s of employees such as from Amazon forcing organizations act properly. These expressions of political activism have led organizations to rethink and reform their policies to further attract and retain employees especially from generation Y.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

All the research and empirical evidence mentioned within the previous sections depicts that the point of focus is not to look at the apparent success of generation Y while mentioning and getting their needs, rather it’s the enactment of certain similar behaviors of the members of this generation in the form of political activism. All the major political, social and business movement mentioned in recent time has been originated and led by the people belonging to this generation due to their lack of acceptance for inequality and oppression etc., which also confirms the core proposition of this work that political activism in generation Y is a global phenomenon.

**Patterns of Behaviors Generation Y Causing Political Activism**

This conceptual work has focused on the behavior of political activism in generation Y as a universally occurring phenomenon, which has not only been witnessed in European countries but has also been seen in south Asian developing countries like Pakistan as a global phenomenon. One of the core reason of this global phenomenon found in both men and women of generation Y is the behavioral similarity among this generation around the global (Alestalo, 2010).

One of the research done by “Reason's information” have mentioned that generation Y have a tendency to be liberal towards their social environment and are more direct when it comes to financial matters. Even at social business and political forums, they recognize themselves in the support of liberalism and democracy rather than as preservationists and Republicans. Pew information (Ng, 2015) also revealed that they are more participative and more clear in declaring themselves as libertarians than previous generations same age group people. Especially when it comes to economic, political, geographic and social reforms (King, 2014). One elemental implication for business organization is that these organizations need to consider the behavioral manifestations of generation Y while formulating the attraction and retention strategies leading to the formation of employer brand. Without it the rest is dream in times to come.
References


Business Books.