

TRUST IN ACADEMICS TEACHERS AND IMMEDIATE SUPERVISORS ACCORDING TO SELECTED NATIONALITIES OF THE GENERATION Z

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Purpose: The purpose of this article was to identify differences in evaluations of factors affecting trust in academics and direct supervisors as perceived by Generation Z from Poland, Spain and Turkey.

Design/methodology/approach: The presented analyzes constitute a part of a broader study on the trust that generation Z place in entities from various spheres of life. The article focuses on the academic teachers and supervisors. The research was carried out with the use of CAWI and PAPI methods on a sample of 656 respondents.

Findings: The aspects most and least influential on trust in both academics and supervisors were identified, statistically significant differences in the perception of these aspects depending on nationality were analyzed, and a correlation between respondents' evaluations of individual factors of trust.

Research limitations/implications: The research sample (lack of representativeness of the sample).

Practical implications: The article indicates which trust constructs should be paid attention to by supervisor especially in the aspect of working in multinational teams.

Originality/value: The article indicates differences in the perception of trust constructs among young Poles, Spaniards and Turks. The article is addressed primarily to people managing multinational teams and academic teachers teaching students of various nationalities.

Keywords: trust, aspects of trust, generation Z, supervisor, academic teacher.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic radically changed our daily lives, and was the catalyst for many changes of a social, cultural and political nature. It accelerated trends already in place - such as the rise of virtual interactions, but also aroused mutual distrust among people and deepened existing divisions (Twenge, 2024). In all spheres of life the increasing virtualization of life has contributed to a weakening of relationships and a decline in trust within teams (Lu et al., 2017;

Romeike et al., 2016). The weakening of intra-organizational relationships and lower trust in organizations (Edelmann Trust Barometer, 2021; Fulmer, Ostroff, 2017) has affected all generations – from baby boomers to Generation Z. This is particularly worrisome, as trust is one of the main mechanisms that create a platform for interaction (Stańczyk-Hugiet, Stańczyk, 2013) and plays a key role in shaping motivation and behavior in relationships (Kobylińska, 2018).

Generation Z now comprises more than a third of the world's population and will soon surpass Millennials in numbers. Year after year, more and more representatives of this generation are entering college and becoming professionally active (Ławińska, Korombel, 2023). Zetas have been present on the labor market for a short time often simultaneously pursuing higher education – able to combine both (Wasiluk, Bańkowska, 2021). Gaining their trust to a degree that at least enables them to function in the workplace/education is therefore a challenge faced by both modern managers and academics.

Bearing in mind that trust building is an interactive process in which parties learn to build and maintain credibility depending on organizational, contextual or structural conditions (Six, Sorge, 2008), and that feelings of trust constitute an important element of a strong relationship (Cattell, 2001), the purpose of the article was to identify differences in ratings of factors influencing trust in university teachers and the immediate supervisor as perceived by Generation Z respondents from Spain, Poland and Turkey.

The following research questions were formulated:

PB 1: Which factors are most likely and which are least likely to influence respondents' trust in academics and in their immediate supervisor?

PB 2: Depending on nationality, are there statistically significant differences in respondents' ratings of the perceived importance of the various factors of trust in academics and the immediate supervisor?

PB 3: Is there a correlation between respondents' ratings of the importance of individual factors of trust in academics and the immediate supervisor?

The following research hypotheses were assigned:

H1: Regardless of nationality, the factors most influencing respondents' trust in both academics and immediate supervisor are sincerity and high level of competence.

H2: There are statistically significant differences in respondents' ratings of the perceived importance of the various factors of trust in academics and the immediate supervisor.

H3: There are strong correlations between respondents' evaluations of the importance of individual factors of trust in academics and the immediate supervisor.

Basic statistical measures and non-parametric statistics were used to answer the research questions and verify the hypotheses. Calculations were made using the Statistica 13.1 package.

The article is divided into several sections. The theoretical section briefly reviews the literature in terms of Generation Z. The next section describes the research methodology, and the following section presents and discusses the research results. The final section of the article includes a summary with conclusions and limitations of the conducted research.

2. Generation Z – characteristics

Generation Z, also known as Generation C (connected, communicating, content-centric, compurozed, community-oriented, always clicking, celebrity) (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątowska, 2016), Generation M (multitasking) (Wiktorowicz et al., 2016; Gajda, 2017; Różańska-Bińczyk, 2022), Digital Natives, Generation Like, Screeners, Selfie Generation (Caumont, 2014), and iGeneration (from Appel's iPhone), represents a group of the youngest workers in the labor market with unique experiences and perspectives (Czyczerska et al., 2020), which contributes to the lack of complete information regarding its behavior and expectations (Lipka, 2022).

Agility, creativity and curiosity are regarded as their main characteristics (Oxford Economics, 2021). Generation Z, raised by Generation X, has been taught to have a practical approach to life, to find and develop qualities in themselves that enable them to achieve their goals, and to be competitive. This is a generation of realists who are also individualists (Ławińska, Korombel, 2023).

Representatives of this generation have very high digital competence – the world they were born into functions on the basis of smartphones and the Internet (Sladek, Grabinger, 2014). This is the first group of people who grew up in the era of the Internet, social media, electronic gadgets and cell phones (Różańska-Bińczyk, 2022). For them, cyberspace has the same value as physical space, which is reflected in the ease of sharing information about oneself online (Pandit, 2015) and the ability to build online relationships that often remain exclusively virtual (Jabłońska-Bilewicz, 2016).

For Generation Z, the online world is just as real as the real world. They do not hesitate to share personal information online and see it as an opportunity to make connections that would not otherwise be possible. However, this addiction to the Internet makes it difficult for them to function outside of it (Stillman, D., Stillman, J., 2017), leading to problems in establishing and maintaining personal relationships (Gajda, 2017), including relationships in the professional sphere.

However, this is not (contrary to many opinions) a generation living exclusively online - equally important to them (according to statements) are offline experiences and the need to establish relationships in the real world (Dentsu Aegis Network, 2019). They are, unlike Generation Y, socially oriented and open to new experiences (Wiktorowicz et al., 2016).

3. Methodology

Generation Z, Trust, as a multidimensional (van der Berg, Martins, 2013), complex and multifaceted construct, is also characterized by the lack of a clear definition (Rousseau et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, 2000; McKnight, Chervany, 2001; Mayer et al., 1995; Blomqvist, 1997; Friman et al., 2002; Kharouf, Lund, 2019; Nienaber et al., 2015; Searle et al., 2018; Wasiluk, Tomaszuk, 2020; Büssing, 2002). For the purposes of the article, the definition of this concept was adopted as *the trustee's conviction that the trusted person will not let him down, will not take conscious actions that could hurt or harm him* (Wasiluk, Tomaszuk, 2022, pp. 61). The multidimensionality of trust determines the use of diverse measurement scales (Żądło, 2014). In constructing the research tool, the measurement scale of Mishra and Mishra (1994) was modeled.

The implemented scale (Table 1) was adapted for the purpose of the study, which was to determine the extent to which the various aspects affect the respondents' trust in (respectively) academics and immediate supervisor.

Table 1.

The measurement scale used

S	Statement
S1	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should be completely honest with me
S2	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should prioritize the interests of the university over his own
S3	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should keep the promises he/she makes
S4	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should be a competent person in his/her work
S5	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should always express true feelings on important issues
S6	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should look after my well-being
S7	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should have a significant share in the success achieved by a university
S8	I trust that I should be able to rely on an academic teacher/supervisor
S9	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should undertake actions that are a consequence of previous declarations
S10	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should share important information with me
S11	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should care about the future of the university
S12	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should help to solve important problems at the university
S13	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should have consistent expectations towards me
S14	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should be able to make personal sacrifices for the university
S15	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should be willing to acknowledge their own mistakes
S16	I trust that an academic teacher/supervisor should help the university in crisis situations

Source: compiled from (Mishra, Mishra, 1994).

Respondents were asked to indicate their position on each statement (separately for each subject), on a five-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree; 5 - strongly agree).

The scale was interpreted following Espina et al. (2017). The reliability of the scale was checked using Cronbach's α coefficient. The calculated statistics (0.79 for the measurement scale used to measure trust in academics and 0.84 for the immediate supervisor) indicate sufficient and high consistency of the items included, respectively.

The analyses presented here represent only a part of the research conducted (the total sample consisted of 1185 respondents from 21 countries), the purpose of which was to identify differences in evaluations of factors influencing trust in selected entities in the opinion of Generation Z.

The article focuses on the answers of respondents who are representatives of the three most numerous nationalities of the study - Spaniards, Poles and Turks. The characteristics of the respondents (N = 656) are included in Table 2. The respondents were people born after 1995, simultaneously studying and having experience in the labor market. The survey was conducted in late 2021 and early 2022 with a combined technique, using CAWI and PAPI methods. The methods used made it possible to achieve a high level of standardization and minimize the interviewer's influence on the respondents' opinions, as well as provide a sense of complete anonymity, which contributed to increasing the quality of the data collected (Malhotra, 2010).

Table 2.

Characteristics of respondents

Country of origin of respondents	Number (%) of respondents
Spain	342 (52.1%)
Poland	230 (35.1%)
Turkey	84 (12.8%)
TOTAL	656 (100%)

Source: compiled on the basis of the conducted survey.

Spaniards were the dominant group of respondents, while Generation Z representatives from Turkey were the least numerous.

4. Analysis of research results

The importance of the various factors influencing trust in academics is presented in Table 3. Analysis of the data allows us to observe differences in the perception of the factors with the highest impact on trust in the subject under analysis. Spanish students ranked consistency, sharing information and willingness to admit mistakes as the most important factors; Polish students ranked competence, keeping promises and, like the Spaniards, the ability to admit mistakes; while Turkish students ranked keeping promises (like the Poles), expressing true feelings and sincerity, respectively.

With regard to the least important factors, more similarities can be observed - all nationalities indicated putting the interests of the university above their own (least important for Spaniards) and the ability to make personal sacrifices (least important for Poles and Turks). The "Top 3" least important factors additionally included having specific expectations from students (indications from Spanish and Polish respondents) and concern for the well-being of students (indications from Turkish respondents). The least varied, as indicated by the coefficient of variation, were the responses of Polish students.

Table 3.*Evaluation of statements on trust in academics measurement scale by nationality of respondents*

Statements	Spain			Poland			Turkey		
	\bar{x}	M_e	V	\bar{x}	M_e	V	\bar{x}	M_e	V
S1	3.68	4	31.73	4.52	5	15.83	4.37	4	17.33
S2	3.54	4	32.46	2.96	3	33.57	3.33	3	31.01
S3	3.79	4	27.89	4.68	5	12.13	4.46	5	17.19
S4	3.88	4	26.85	4.80	5	10.07	3.95	4	26.32
S5	3.82	4	26.56	3.82	4	26.43	4.45	5	18.58
S6	3.64	4	28.69	3.59	4	28.17	3.30	3	35.78
S7	3.78	4	26.97	3.95	4	20.37	3.74	4	34.77
S8	3.78	4	27.20	4.22	4	18.23	3.77	4	25.80
S9	3.92	4	23.52	4.40	5	17.07	4.02	4	21.12
S10	3.91	4	26.46	4.24	5	21.48	3.89	4	36.33
S11	3.82	4	26.29	3.95	4	22.17	3.79	4	27.83
S12	3.73	4	28.60	3.93	4	21.54	4.00	4	22.63
S13	3.56	4	29.49	3.50	4	27.42	3.19	3	37.21
S14	3.55	3	29.08	2.66	3	40.32	2.81	3	49.57
S15	3.84	4	25.27	4.60	5	12.95	4.31	5	20.05
S16	3.73	4	29.66	3.76	4	22.55	3.93	4.0	20.83

Source: compiled on the basis of conducted survey.

The conducted Kruskal-Wallis test confirms that there are statistically significant differences in the ratings of individual statements on the trust in immediate supervisor measurement scale (Table 4) - as observed for 12 statements. Most differences were observed between Spanish and Polish representatives (with respect to 9 statements), followed by those between Spanish and Turkish representatives (with respect to 7 statements). The least statistically significant differences in respondents' answers occurred between Polish and Turkish respondents (differences occurred with respect to 5 statements).

Table 4.*Kruskal-Wallis test of statements on trust in academics measurement scale by nationality of respondents*

Statements	H	p	Statistically significant differences
S1	90.11	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey
S2	37.65	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S3	126.36	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey
S4	137.11	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S5	31.17	< 0.05	between Spain and Turkey; between Poland and Turkey
S6	6.35	< 0.05	between Spain and Turkey
S7	2.94	0.23	-
S8	29.19	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S9	43.32	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S10	14.04	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland
S11	2.06	0.35	-
S12	5.68	0.058	-
S13	6.55	< 0.05	between Spain and Turkey
S14	85.91	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey
S15	92.59	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey
S16	1.81	0.404	-

Source: compiled on the basis of conducted survey.

Similarly, the data collected with regard to trust in relation to the immediate supervisor was analyzed (Table 5). Again, the factors influencing the formation of trust differ depending on the nationality of the respondents. For Spaniards, the most important factors are assistance in crisis situations, concern for the future of the organization and competence (none of the factors mentioned were among the most important in relation to academics); for Poles, keeping promises, also competence and the ability to admit a mistake (for this nationality, these are also the most important factors in terms of forming trust in academics); for Turks, honesty, keeping promises and the ability to admit a mistake (here, too, a similar ranking of responses can be observed in relation to academics). H1 was verified negatively - although both sincerity and a high level of competence are among the most highly rated factors, but not by all nationalities, differences can also be observed depending on the subject of analysis.

With regard to the least important factors, as in the case of the survey of trust in immediate superiors, more similarities can also be seen in the responses of the different nationalities. The least important factor in the opinion of all the groups surveyed turned out to be the ability to make personal sacrifices for the organization, while the group of the three least important factors also included concern for the well-being of employees (according to all groups), specific expectations of employees (according to Spaniards and Turks) and putting the organization's interests before one's own (according to Poles). Similarly, as in the case of trust in academics, responses from Polish respondents were the least varied.

Table 5.

Evaluation of statements on trust in immediate superior measurement scale by nationality of respondents

Statements	Spain			Poland			Turkey		
	\bar{x}	M_e	V	\bar{x}	M_e	V	\bar{x}	M_e	V
S1	3.74	4	28.55	4.60	5	13.75	4.40	5	19.02
S2	3.77	4	27.33	3.27	3	33.03	3.68	4	31.06
S3	3.81	4	27.19	4.77	5	10.86	4.38	5	18.03
S4	3.84	4	25.60	4.77	5	10.31	3.86	4	27.34
S5	3.71	4	26.65	4.07	4	23.69	4.15	4	23.18
S6	3.69	4	29.54	3.78	4	25.86	3.20	3	39.01
S7	3.73	4	27.74	4.30	4	18.59	3.77	4	30.60
S8	3.74	4	28.11	4.48	5	15.28	3.83	4	29.43
S9	3.77	4	24.08	4.50	5	15.23	4.21	4	19.86
S10	3.83	4	25.02	4.35	5	18.99	3.73	4	36.16
S11	3.84	4	24.68	4.36	5	17.48	4.05	4	20.26
S12	3.81	4	28.02	4.33	4	16.50	4.11	4	24.79
S13	3.54	4	30.39	4.01	4	21.53	3.37	4	32.83
S14	3.42	4	31.29	3.22	3	36.21	2.94	3	43.64
S15	3.73	4	25.02	4.72	5	11.89	4.25	4	19.96
S16	4.06	4	23.96	4.21	4	20.71	4.14	4	21.24

Source: compiled on the basis of conducted survey.

The conducted Kruskal-Wallis test confirms that there are statistically significant differences in the ratings of individual statements on the trust in immediate supervisor measurement scale (Table 6) - as observed for 15 statements. Most differences were observed between Spaniards and Poles (with respect to 13 statements), followed by Poles and Turks (with respect to 9 statements). The least statistically significant differences in respondents' answers occurred between Spaniards and Turks (for 6 statements). This allows for positive verification of H2.

Table 6.

Kruskal-Wallis test of statements on trust in immediate supervisor measurement scale by nationality of respondents

Statements	H	p	Statistically significant differences
S1	109.00	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey
S2	28.43	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S3	152.10	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey; between Poland and Turkey
S4	156.4	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S5	28.09	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey
S6	13.06	< 0.05	between Spain and Turkey; between Poland and Turkey
S7	48.49	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S8	79.73	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S9	95.67	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey; between Poland and Turkey
S10	46.41	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S11	45.26	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S12	32.84	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey
S13	35.76	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Poland and Turkey
S14	9.41	< 0.05	between Spain and Turkey
S15	170.46	< 0.05	between Spain and Poland; between Spain and Turkey; between Poland and Turkey
S16	2.83	0.24	-

Source: compiled on the basis of conducted survey.

Spearman's rank correlation analysis, conducted for the ratings of the statements of the trust in academics and immediate supervisor measurement scale (Table 7), allows us to observe that there is a positive correlation for each statement (for each nationality). However, an analysis of the r_s values shows that for the answers of Spanish respondents there are no strong relationships; for three statements - S1, S3 and S13 there is a moderate relationship; for the remaining statements there is a low or very low correlation. For Polish respondents, there is also no strong correlation; for thirteen statements (S1, S2, S3, S5, S6, S8, S9, S10, S12, S13, S14, S15 and S16) there is a moderate correlation. For Turkish respondents, one correlation of high strength (S1) and twelve of moderate strength (S1, S4, S5, S6, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S15, S16) were noted. H3 was verified negatively.

Table 7.

Spearman's rank correlation for ratings of statements on trust in immediate supervisor and co-workers measurement scale by nationality of respondents

Statements	Spain		Poland		Turkey	
	p	rS	p	rS	p	rS
S1	<0.05	0.45	<0.05	0.53	<0.05	0.48
S2	<0.05	0.34	<0.05	0.47	<0.05	0.29
S3	<0.05	0.40	<0.05	0.41	<0.05	0.37
S4	<0.05	0.34	<0.05	0.34	<0.05	0.56
S5	<0.05	0.16	<0.05	0.54	<0.05	0.45
S6	<0.05	0.19	<0.05	0.61	<0.05	0.60
S7	<0.05	0.19	<0.05	0.38	<0.05	0.83
S8	<0.05	0.23	<0.05	0.54	<0.05	0.52
S9	<0.05	0.24	<0.05	0.55	<0.05	0.54
S10	<0.05	0.29	<0.05	0.55	<0.05	0.63
S11	<0.05	0.14	<0.05	0.38	<0.05	0.47
S12	<0.05	0.19	<0.05	0.46	<0.05	0.46
S13	<0.05	0.42	<0.05	0.56	<0.05	0.44
S14	<0.05	0.26	<0.05	0.57	<0.05	0.39
S15	<0.05	0.21	<0.05	0.41	<0.05	0.56
S16	<0.05	0.26	<0.05	0.48	<0.05	0.53

Source: compiled on the basis of conducted survey.

5. Summary

Generation Z is still powering the walls of higher education institutions and, at the same time, is already present in the labor market. Considering how diverse and still unexplored this generation is, this implies many challenges for the rest of those entities functioning in the aforementioned structures. The need to enter into relations with Generation Z requires, in addition to being open to diversity, ambiguity and uncertainty (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomętowska, 2016), also learning about the aspects of trust that are most relevant to it. In light of the analysis, the conclusion emerges that the aspects of trust relevant to Generation Z are more differentiated by the origin (nationality) of the trusting one than by the potential subject of trust. This is supported by the fact that, despite the significant virtualization of young people's lives, the nationality to which they declare belonging and in which they grew up influences the formation of the adult individual (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2016; Gajda, 2017).

Although the limitations of the conducted research (lack of representativeness of the sample) cannot be overlooked, the obtained results can be a starting point for further considerations - especially in the aspect of working and studying in multinational teams. The emerging significant statistical differences in assessments of the importance of various aspects depending on nationality indicate the need for detailed research to understand how cultural differences affect the perception of trust in the workplace.

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