Chapter 3
Contextualization and Social identification Process of Generation

The concept of generation has been extensively researched in cross-cultural studies. Most available literature is about applying a Western perspective to an Eastern context. Thus, it is not uncommon to refer to Baby Boomers and Veterans to label generations in Eastern studies. Although such an approach has addresses some fundamental issues, cultural nuances remain largely unexplored. It is imperative to understand and accept that generation is a culturally rooted concept.

What does generation mean in the Indian context? Do people identify themselves with their respective generations? This chapter seeks to answer these questions with the theoretical underpinnings of Karl Mannheim’s Generation theory and Henri Tajfel’s social identity theory. The rationale is that the phenomenon of intergenerational communication cannot be investigated without contextualizing the three generations and determining whether the participants actually identify themselves with the generation they are categorized in.

Defining the concept of Generation

The present study is based on the works of Karl Mannheim to define the concept of generation. Mannheim’s theory is the anchor point of the discussion. The basic assumption of Mannheim’s theory on which this study is founded is that the formation, definition and classification of generation cannot be guided by the deterministic approach of over-reliance on biological components (Simirenko, 1966).

Relationship between generation and socialization

Generation cannot be defined without touching on the concept of socialization. A generation comes into existence in the process of socialization. It is assumed that significant events\(^8\) influence the process of socialization that, in turn, impact generational characteristics. There is a constant interplay between significant events and the socialization process that shape a generation.

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\(^8\) Significant events in the present study refer to any socio-political-economic event at a macro level.
Grusec and Hastings (2007:1) proposed an overarching definition of socialization, which refers to the ways by which individuals are assisted in becoming members of one or more social groups. Deep and lasting socialization takes place as the individual is growing up (Childhood/adolescents), which continues through the individual’s lifespan (Maccoby, 2007). Thus, to contextualize generation, the researcher asked participants to list the significant events (social, political, economic) that impacted those most. They were also asked to share their views on the various dimensions and how it influenced their outlook in their growing-up phase. The process of socialization and its influence on generation are discussed in the subsequent chapters on data analysis.

Socialization of a generation and its influence on the communication process is the essence of the present research. The significant events and context that are described in the following sections will help in a concrete understanding about how context builds a firm bond within a generation.

**Generation Classification**

In this study, the researcher has adopted Kupperschimidt definition of generation. ‘A generation is a group of people... who share birth years and experiences as they move through time together, influencing and being influenced by a variety of critical factors.’ (2000:66). It is assumed that national culture\(^9\) influences individual and group behaviour within an organization (J.B.P Sinha, 2008). Srinivasan (2012) asserted that the worldview of the younger generation (generations) will influence their behaviour with other generations. This is termed as the spillover effect wherein personal and social values influence workplace behaviour. It is believed that the effect of these behaviours can be detrimental or beneficial for the different generations in an organization.

Western literature (Westerman & Yamamura, 2006; Kupperschimidt, 2000; Glass, 2007) broadly classifies generations into three categories: Baby Boomers (Born between 1943-1964), Generation X (Born between 1965-1981) and Generation Y (Born between 1982-2000). In this study, the researcher avoids this terminology. Generation is a context-laden concept; and it would be erroneous to use labels that

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\(^9\) Hofsetde’s definition of national culture has been used.
apply to a different context. At the same time, the researcher would like to emphasize that the importance of studies carried out in the West should not be undermined.

It must be acknowledged that Western studies are the basis for current and future research. In their study on the leadership styles of Boomers and Generation X, Yu and Miller (2005) argued that generational differences in western literature do not hold true in a non-Western context. Thus, there is a need to define generations in a given context.

Generations do not have a clear start and end; hence, there is an element of arbitrariness in their classification. Placing generation in context is more important than a start or end date. The present study categorizes generations as:

- Older generation: Brought up and socialized during the Pre-liberalization phase 47-57 years (Born in the period 1955-1965)
- Middle-aged generation: Brought up and socialized during liberalization 35-45 years (Born in the period 1967-1977)
- Younger generation: 22-32 years. Brought up and socialized during technology revolution and IT boom (Born in the period 1980-1990)

Here, the age-range for a generation classification is considered as 10 years instead of 20 years, which is the predominant range in literature. The rationale for selecting a narrow range is that society is a dynamic and rapidly changing entity. A range of 20 years increases the chances of two generations overlapping and being forcibly clubbed as one. For this study, a gap of two to three years is maintained between generations in order to avoid overlapping.

Classifications of generation in the Indian context is governed by the non-academic domain. Deloitte (2010), in their report titled ‘Talking about Whose Generation?’, while discussing the global view of generation has given the following classification for India. Traditional generation is born between 1948-1968, non-traditional generation between 1969-1980, and Generation Y 1980 and onwards.
On similar lines to the Deloitte report, Roongrerngsuke and Liefooghe (2013) carried out a cross-cultural study in Thailand, India, and China in an attempt to contextualize generations. However, it fell short of its objective as it adopted the time frame and terminology of the USA. *This study adopts just the time frame and names of the U.S. Bureau of Census in classifying generations, while providing its own descriptive contents.*

Srinivasan (2012); and Ghosh and Chaudhuri (2009) contextualized generations for India. However, their contextualization is embedded in secondary literature. There is a lack of research on generational classification for India on the basis of primary data. According to the census data (2011 as cited in Srinivasan, 2012), the percentage of people in the age bracket of 0 to 14 years is 29.7%, 15 to 64 years is 64.9%, and above 65 years is 5.5%

According to Mannheim, birth and death years are the initial steps for defining a generation. The role of social factors must be elucidated. Therefore, the next step is to determine the importance of social factors in defining generations. When social factors are excluded, generation is merely a chance product of nature (Mannheim, 1927).
The sociological phenomenon of generations is ultimately based on the rhythm of birth and death. But to be based on a factor does not necessarily mean to be deductible from it, or to be implied in it…the sociological problem of generations therefore begins at that point where the sociological relevance of these biological factors is discovered (Mannheim, 1927: 290-91).

In the present study, generations are contextualized on the basis of nine dimensions: state of technology\textsuperscript{10}, state of economy, family structure in which they were socialized, state of politics, major sporting events, career aspirations, leaders who inspired them, most admired movie stars, and significant events that defined the generation. These dimensions were selected on the basis of literature (Kupperschimidt, 2000; Goldman and Schmalz, 2006; Smola and Sutton, 2002). The participants were asked to locate themselves in the appropriate settings during their growing up phase and then respond with respect to the dimensions stated above. It was assumed that socialization during growing-up phase would influence her/his behaviour in the subsequent stages of life.

The possibility of really questioning and reflecting on things only emerges at the point where personal experimentation with life begins-round about the age 17, sometimes little earlier or sometimes little later (Spranger, 1925:28 as cited in Mannheim, 1927)

Similarly, Lambert (1972) proposed the concept of political and cultural consciousness. Political and cultural consciousness is based on both bio-psychological and socio-psychological determinants that usually develop during the age of 18-26 years. This is the best (or the most probable) time when events impact significantly in the realization of consciousness. Therefore, when stratification of experiences happens in the consciousness, experiences in this age range will be bracketed as ‘significant’.

This critical period makes possible generation gaps through magnifying the importance of those particular events occurring in the segment of history associated with that period of the life cycle. Thus, there is a certain experiential tendency inherent in that bio-socio temporal location called a generation (Lambert, 1972: 25)

\textsuperscript{10} Usage of the concept technology in the present study refers to advancement in computer-aided communication, gadgets, ERP and social networking sites.
Socializing Context for the older generation. The older generation cites closed economy and the emergency of the 1970s as their defining events. The condition of the economy was gloomy; and foreign exchange reserves were dangerously low. Bureaucratic controls like license raj strangled investment initiative. Deepak, (older generation) recalled that people would wait for 7-8 years for a scooter after booking. Another older generation participant remembered the ‘ban on Coca-Cola over Swadeshi cloud’.

Kumar (2005) discussed the restrictive attitude of the Indian government towards Foreign Investment in the 1960s. From 1973, FERA (Foreign Exchange Regulation Act) required foreign companies to register under Indian laws with up to 40% of foreign equity. According to the older generation, the closed economy was a bottleneck for opportunities. The older generation accepted the opportunities that were available then. According to Sarthak (Older generation) said, ‘just getting a job in our times was a higher priority rather a desirable job profile’.

Key industries were kept with the public sector, which resulted in skewed employment growth. It was only after industrial reforms that the sectorial restriction for key industries was removed (Ahluwalia, 2002). For the older generation, the defining political situation was the India-Pakistan war of 1971, the emergency during 1975-1977, and the consequent formation of the Janata Party. Key sporting events that the older generation identified with were India’s Cricket World Cup win in 1983, The Asian Games in 1982 and the famous rivalry between John McEnroe and Bjorn Borg in Tennis.

Career aspirations of the older generation were in engineering or medicine; the priority was to obtain a degree and start earning to support the family. Leaders that inspired the older generation were JRD Tata, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi. Favourite film celebrities for the older generation are Amitabh Bachchan, Dilip Kumar, and the late Rajesh Khanna.

Older generation reported that they were brought up in a joint household set-up. They agreed that their upbringing in a joint household positively influenced their value system. It made them more sincere, honest, and aware of the importance of relationships. They also recalled that, during their time, technology was at a nascent stage. Television had just begun to make an impact. The personal computer was almost unknown. One of the respondent recalled that one had to book a long-distance (trunk) call to speak to relatives outside the state. Technology was also not affordable
to common man and was restricted to the elite. In contrast today, it is the low cost that has accelerated its penetration into all sections of society.

Older generation also admitted that of the lack of support from technology made work harder and longer. Handwritten or typed letters were used to communicate, a lengthy process, quite the opposite of the ease of emails today. The following table summarizes the older generation’s view of their growing up years.

The perceptions of the older generation is summarized in the following table

**Table3.1 Socialization Contexts of the older generation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Older generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant event</td>
<td>Closed economy and Emergency in 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political situation</td>
<td>Indo-Pak war (1972), emergency in 1970s and formation of Janta Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Economy</td>
<td>Closed economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Technology</td>
<td>At the nascent stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Aspirations</td>
<td>To be an engineer or a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders who inspired</td>
<td>JRD Tata, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Household</td>
<td>Joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Famous movie stars</td>
<td>Amitabh Bachchan, Dilip Kumar, and Rajesh Khanna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports events</td>
<td>India’s win in the Cricket World Cup in 1983, the Asian Games of 1982 in Delhi, the rivalry between John McEnroe and Bjorn Borg in Tennis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Socialization of the Middle-Aged generation.** Middle-aged generation remembered de-regularization of economy and subsequent advent of LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization) as the defining events of their generation. The economy started to open up and create more opportunities for people; and the monopoly of public sector enterprises ended. Opening of the economy influenced the career choices of the middle-aged generation. They became more proactive in planning career moves.

About the Indian economy, the middle-aged generation stresses that the opening up increased growth rates and made India one of the emerging economic powers. The economic reforms of the 1990s are now well-known; what is important, however, is to
understand that the reforms were actually initiated in the 1980s; acceleration and the defining changes happened only in the 1990s.

Among important industrial reform was the delicensing of most industrial activities, tax rationalization, encouragement of the private sector and flexibility to public sector organizations. These steps indeed propelled economic growth and helped Indian businesses (Kholi, 2006). Middle-aged generation states that with the entry of MNCs, employment prospects increased. Work content received more attention and the middle-aged tried to match their educational qualification to job profile.

Members of the succeeding “Non-Traditional” generation experienced the impact of market liberalization very early in their careers and benefited from the initial boom in outsourcing. As a consequence, they are often more entrepreneurial than the Traditionals and favor career progression based on merit rather than tenure. The economic boom presented an explosion in opportunities that has resulted in rapid career advancement, a decrease in loyalty to employers and increased demand for wage inflation (Deloitte, 2010:92).

The assassination of Indira Gandhi, Mandal commission and Bofors Scam are cited as momentous developments in the political sphere for the middle-aged generation. This generation credits the leadership of Narsimha Rao and Manmohan Singh for significant development in the Indian economy. Kholi (2006) states that people like Manmohan Singh, Montek Singh Aluwalia and Amar Nath Verma were the key decision makers who understood the need to liberalize economy in order to increase the pace of the economic growth. Career aspirations of the middle-aged generation saw a shift. They wanted to join the civil services or acquire a graduate degree (MBA). Mahatma Gandhi is regarded as the leader that inspired the middle-aged generation.

Family structure and relationships had a mixed pattern — both joint and nuclear family upbringings were reported. This pattern reveals a transition period during which family structures were shifting to the nuclear. The transition period may also be the reason why much of the values of the older generation are retained in the middle-aged — as well as some of the values of the younger generation they came in contact with. Major sporting events of this generation were the Cricket World Cup 1996, and the tennis rivalry between Monica Seles and Steffi Graff. The most admired movie stars for the middle-generation were Amitabh Bachchan and Aamir Khan.
Technology had reached the adolescent stage and colour television became popular, which came into existence during the older generation time. People’s awareness of technology increased and their attitude towards it was positive. Communications moved from the landline phone to pagers. DOS was the predominant Operating System. For the middle-aged generation, technology was still not available to everyone and was restricted to the elites. Technology was a determinant in class demarcation.

"...see it was not possible that everyone afford mobile phones. Earlier, incoming calls were chargeable. Since the technology was new, everyone could not pay for it. This made technology possible only for the ‘haves’ of society (Ratan, middle-aged generation)"

The perceptions of the middle-aged generation is summarized in the following table.

**Table 3.2 Socialization Contexts of the middle-aged generation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of contextualization</th>
<th>Middle-aged generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant event</td>
<td>Deregularization of the economy and advent of LPG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political situation</td>
<td>Assassination of Indira Gandhi, Mandal commission, Bofors Scam and Liberalization of Indian economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Economy</td>
<td>Open and created more opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Technology</td>
<td>Adolescent stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Aspirations</td>
<td>Civil services and attain a graduate degree (MBA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders who inspired</td>
<td>Mahatma Gandhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Household</td>
<td>Extended and nuclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Famous movie stars</td>
<td>Amitabh Bachchan and Aamir Khan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports events</td>
<td>Cricket world cup, 1996, the tennis rivalry between Monica Seles and Steffi Graff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Socialization Contexts of the younger generation.** Younger generation cites three significant events that defined their generation: the technology revolution, boom in software sector and economic recession. An indicator of India’s global presence in IT sector is that there are 2,500 Indian exporters of software. TCS, Wipro, and Infosys are recognized brands globally. The United States is the largest market (India exports 63% of its software products to the US) followed by Europe (26%) (NASSCOM McKinsey, 2002). With software boom, the younger generation said that their
generation and those have recently became part of the middle-aged generation preferred software based education.

About the state of technology, the younger generation feels that technology is at its peak and is exercising its influence on every aspect of society. Amit (younger generation) observed, “technology is evolving at a rapid pace. There is a new smartphone in the market every day, with newer and more advanced features. What is good today becomes obsolete tomorrow”. The roles of media, Internet and smartphones were also highlighted by the younger generation. Technology has eroded the concept of time and space.

The economic downturn in 2009 was preceded by years of economic growth, which was driven by external factors (greater reliance on exports and capital inflows). Therefore, when the world economy was affected, the ripple effects were felt by the Indian economy (Ghosh & Chandrashekar, 2009). Within India, MNCs froze hiring and salary hikes. Though, with advent of LPG, the economy started growing; but as the world economy remains depressed Indian economy has continues to be subdued, and the growth rate has declined.

These trends of employee aspiration continued with the Indian Gen Ys who have fully embraced a career model of rotation between employers as they pursue career advancement. Furthermore, they typically value talent programs that speak to their development needs and opportunities for advancement and enrichment (for example, through opportunities to work globally) (Deloitte, 2010: 93).

The younger generation mostly cited negative political events like Godhra and Babri Masjid Riots, and the various scams (Coalgate, CWG scam, 2G). In addition, the concept of coalition government was termed as the key political change of their generation. The younger generation grew up in a nuclear household. Gore (1990) stated that the influence of industrialization on family structure is of sociological importance. It was seen that, with advent of LPG, joint families gave way to nuclear family structures.

Younger generation is keen on attaining a good higher education status. Most of them aspire to do MBA (or equivalent management qualifications) or doctorates. Sporting events that have had a significant impact on the younger generation are India winning T20 world cup, Sachin Tendulkar, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer rivalry and India reaching the 2003 World Cup Final. Favourite Hollywood and Bollywood personalities are Tom hanks, Amitabh Bachchan, Aamir Khan, Katrina kaif, Kareena,
Denzil Washington. Evidently increasing exposure to the West has had its impact on their way of thinking.

The perceptions of the younger generation is summarized in the following table

**Table 3.3 Socialization Contexts of the younger generation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Younger generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant event</td>
<td>Technology revolution (1990s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political situation</td>
<td>Godhra and Babri Masjid riots, Scams and Concept of coalition government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Economy</td>
<td>After LPG economy started growing. World economic downturn has negatively impacted the economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Technology</td>
<td>At peak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Aspirations</td>
<td>Aspire to be an MBA or a PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders who inspired</td>
<td>Anna Hazare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Household</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Famous movie stars</td>
<td>Tom Hanks, Amitabh Bachchan, Aamir Khan, Katrina kaif, Kareena, Denzil Washington.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports events</td>
<td>India winning 20-20 world cup, Sachin Tendulkar, Nadal and Federer rivalry, India reaching to 2003 world cup finals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Application of Karl Mannheim’s Generation Theory**

Karl Mannheim described a tripartite presentation of generation, which discusses how a group of people becomes part of a generation. Tripartite presentation constitutes generation location, generation as actuality and generation as unit. In this study, it is seen that all the three generations pass through each phase to become part of a generation. Being part of generational unit makes them part of the same generation.

**Older generation and Mannheim’s theory.** According to Mannheim, birth year and socio-historical context constitute generation location. Therefore, in this study, the older generation’s birth year range is 1955-1965 and their socio-historical context (as discussed above) is the generation location. When a group of people in a given generation location participate together and are conscious of their common destiny caused by socio-historical context, they consolidate as ‘generation as actuality’. In the present study the older generation accepted that the closed economy (as a significant event) would/has negatively impacted their career prospects, thereby making them part of generation as actuality.
Our youth period was significantly impacted by the economic condition of the country. India was trying to find its foothold on the global map after independence but the socialist economic policies made the scene bad for its citizens and businesses. The kind of luxury which the current generation has, even the middle-aged generation has, we never had. Job prospects faced the major brunt. (Bajaj, Older generation).

According to Mannheim, further strong and concrete bonds are required, which come into being when a group of people, who are part of generation as actuality, share similar outlook and reactions to the event/destiny. In the present study, in view of the closed economy of their time, the older generation showed similar response. Instead of trying to get their dream jobs, they took whatever was available and offered, even if there was a mismatch educational qualification and job requirements.

[...]just to give one example, I graduated in 1983 with degree in electronics and probably I have done less of electronics engineering and more of electrical and mechanical engineering in this organization. Younger generation is not prepared for something like this. They prefer to have a job which matches their educational qualification, such kind of luxury was not available to us. (Rajesh Kaul, Older generation).

Middle-aged generation and Mannheim’s theory. For the middle-aged generation, generation location constitutes their birth year (1967-1977) and social-historical context (as discussed above). Generation location, however, merely focuses on the co-presence of people sharing similar birth years in a given context. There is need for deeper level of association amongst them. Generation as an actuality came into existence for the middle-aged generation when they identified LPG as the significant event and participated in it. It was considered to be a positive event which would change their future.

The middle-aged generation is seen as a generation unit as the members’ choice and actions on LPG were similar. They welcomed the process of privatization as it provided them with better career opportunities. They did not show any resistance to the LPG process. Middle-aged generation termed LPG as a positive event, which changed their professional life for the better. They could control the direction of their careers.

This whole LPG thing was a blessing for us. When we were in college, LPG came into being. The economy started to revive and it had a direct influence on us. When I say direct influence, I mean that job prospects became brighter as big business houses started to invest, MNCs started put up their offices in India. All these things...
gave us options, which was not available to our older generation. Options were not only restricted to jobs but to everything, be it cars, consumer goods or education. LPG has done good for this country (Ajay, Middle-aged generation)

**Younger generation and Mannheim’s theory.** The birth year and age of the younger generation, taken with their socio-historical context (as mentioned above), makes them part of a given generational location. By being part of generation location, the people are merely sharing the same socio-historical context. Their participation in, and being part of, the significant event ‘technology revolution and IT boom’ makes them a generation as actuality. This additional nexus may be described as *participation in the common destiny* of the social and historical unit (Heidegger, 1927:282 as cited in Mannheim, 1927). In generation as actuality, a strong bond is created between people as they participate in the social currents in the generation location. Younger generation participated in the technology revolution and IT boom.

Yeah, but at least I am proud in thinking that I am part of a generation who has seen most of revolutionary changes in electronics and communication system. When I was in 4 and 5th standard we had lots of playgrounds, we had ‘gulli-danda, kabbadi’ but as soon as I was in growing up things started to change. When I went to college technology revolution started to peak. It did influence my career choice. I did my B.E in computer science as I felt job prospect is going to be better. Technology revolution is continuing to influence coming generations also. I have also seen that children of 3-4years are using tablets and using games like angry birds. So I feel that I am in a better generation who has seen revolution in our electronic gadgets and all the things (Swapnil, Younger generation).

When a group of people, who are part of a generation as actuality, represent more concrete bonds they become part of a generation unit. While being part of generation as actuality, people might show differing responses to the event whereas in a generation unit people demonstrate similar reactions to the event, which makes the bond stronger. In the present study, people who are part of the younger generation demonstrate similar reaction towards technology revolution. They have adopted technology and effortlessly incorporated it in their day-to-day tasks.

The formation of a generation can be schematically represented as below
The preceding section discussed the contextualization of generation on the basis of biological and sociological component. Biological component included birth year of the generations. Sociological component included significant events and the socio-cultural context. Karl Mannheim’s theory was applied to define generation. In the following section, social identity theory is applied in the discussion of the process of participants’ identification with their generation. It is important to mention here that, when a person becomes a part of a generation unit, a type of intergroup relation and generational identification becomes apparent. It is seen that by being part of a generation, a person starts demonstrating his/her social identity by making intergroup relations/behavior apparent.

**Social Identification Process**

**Application of Social Identity Theory**

Applying social identity to the present study makes generation a social category. The initial posit of social identity theory is that individuals classify themselves into social categories (Tajfel and Turner, 1979,1986). Individual action may not always be governed by logic and reason, but is definitely guided by motives. These motives compel people to behave in a particular manner.
Social identity theory identifies cognitive and affective motives as the trigger points for social categorization (Hogg and Grieve, 1999; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Reducing the level of uncertainty attached to self-concept, the need to simplify, and structured experiences are cognitive needs identified in published literature. On the other hand, to increase the level of self-esteem is an affective need. In the present study, self-esteem and reducing uncertainty are the predominant trigger points for the social categorization of generations.

It was observed during the study that, after social categorization, the participant compared their in-groups to the out-groups. With three generations at the workplace, there will be different combinations of in-group and out-group comparisons. In-group comparison with out-groups is termed as social comparison. The dimensions on which the in-group is compares itself are those that aid them to increase their self-esteem and build positive social identity with respect to the out-group.

It can thus be deduced that the in-group would adopt and measure only those dimensions that result in a positive evaluation of the group (Brown, 2000). However, in this study, it was also observed that, while comparing with out-group on certain aspects, generations not only evaluated themselves favourably with respect to their out-groups, they also accepted that in some aspects the out-groups were better. This insight is at variance from theory and shows that in-group and out-group relationships are not constant, but changes with parameters.

According to theory (Brown, 2000), unsatisfactory identity leads to shift in group membership (Social mobility) or elevation of current group membership (Social change) to dilute the categories by making them psychologically less useful (Decategorization model); or to build a superordinate category (common in-group identity). Shifts in group membership were not observed in the present study. The participants conceded that there are certain factors based on which their counterparts in the other generations fared better; but this did not result in the formation of an unsatisfactory identity. As the generations were able to maintain their positive social identity, shifts in social identity were not seen. Therefore, as a social group, generations were able to maintain positively valued distinctness from other groups.

The social identity process is more distinctive between the older and the younger generations than with the middle-aged generation. Older and the younger generation find middle-aged generation closer to either generation. This reduces the differentiating parameters. As a result, social identity process is weaker in the middle-
aged generation in relation to the older and the younger generations. Shripal (older generation) said, ‘for me it is much more easy to differentiate between the younger and the older generation, I don’t have any concrete image about the middle-age generation’.

Generational identity is a part of self-concept, which helps individual to connect with society. If the older and the younger generation’s personal identity is diluted (depersonalization) in the social identification process, individual identity in the middle-aged generation gets diluted to a greater extent in their constant effort to match the other generations. The role of social identity theory will be understood in subsequent data analysis chapters (3, 4, 5 & 6) in the discussion on communication accommodation theory.
Below is the Schematic representation of social identity theory in the present study.

![Schematic representation of social identity theory](image)

**Figure 3.2** schematic representation of SIT- data driven

**Characterization of the Middle-aged and the Younger generations by the Older generation**

**Characteristics of Middle-aged generation.** The older generation observed that the middle-aged people have developed communication skills over a period of time. This characteristic is typical of the middle-aged generation and the older generation knows when they are interacting or communicating with a middle-aged generation person. Therefore, communication is seen as an important tool to know others.

**(a) Experience and maturity make the middle-aged generation a balanced group.** The Older generation places the middle-aged in the 30-40 years age group. They are considered to be experienced and having in-depth knowledge of their work. Experience is believed to positively influence the communication process.
Participants of older generation felt that the middle-aged generation does not feel disheartened or has negative feelings when the communication is not to their expectations.

*About the middle-aged generation’s employee the first thing that comes to my mind is that he has a little bit of exposure and experience at Parivartan. Therefore, I can probably rely on them more. If a job has to be done, I wouldn’t trust a fresher. I would prefer to have somebody who is of middle age. The reason is that a person from the middle-aged generation has lot of experience to support him. They are more open in their communication as they have exposure and experience. So their communication is much more open, they don’t tend to clinch up, feel disgusted or dejected that what it this- ‘yeh kya hai’. They know how to tackle day-to-day issues. So that is the main difference between the middle-aged and the younger generation (Rajesh Kaul, Older generation).*

With experience on their side, the middle-aged generation has developed a degree of maturity that is reflected positively in their communications. Their knowledge and experience comes useful handling difficult situations and they are often able to find solutions even in tough challenges.

*I personally think there is a sense of maturity. The person is matured and is able to take mature decisions. Younger generation is unable to take matured decisions. They will say OK to everything and would portray that they like it. They basically lack the ability to take decision. In office environment person is required to take decision, when he is not able to take the same then he can be termed as an incapable person (Mishra, Older generation).*

Experience and the maturity that it brings, make the middle-aged generation a balanced and stable one. In addition, they are aware of the goals and objectives of the organization, which helped in bringing more clarity into their communication. The older generation argued that it was these characteristics as well as middle-aged understanding of the demands of the business that make them superior to the younger generation.

*Middle-aged generation has experience and maturity. They are focused. A middle-aged person knows what he has to do, what his goals are. He therefore charts out his path to achieve them and does not deviate from it. This makes communication more specific and brings in more clarity (Bajaj, Older generation)*

*I consider that they are almost balanced generation. They have the ability to bridge the gap between the older and the younger generations. For me it is much more easy to differentiate between the younger and the older generation, I don’t have any concrete image about the middle-age generation (Shripal, Older generation).*
They are conscious of their own and others’ body language. The middle-aged generation is aware that body language is an important and vital component of communication. To the middle-aged generation, body language must be given its due attention as it facilitates the process of understanding nuances of the communication. Body language provides a holistic perspective to the communication process and plays an important role in human interaction. It allows the participants to know whether their messages are understood. In certain situations, verbal communication is so structured and ritualized that it can no longer be taken as a reliable measure of recipient’s reaction and mental set up (Meier-Faust, 2002).

[...] middle-aged generation’s ability to communicate in diverse modes has definitely improved in all aspects: written, spoken and body language. People in their middle age are much more conscious about their body language. ... they understand that that body language is very important. When you are younger you may not attach much importance to body language. However, when you reach certain age then may be because of some craving, through discussion, through some other way, they have been told, imbibed or learned that body language is important in communication. Secondly, even if they are from a vernacular background, with experience when they reach a certain age and level that [...] communication skills undergo a definite improvement. They are much more polite and officious. They are able to get along with people (Tushar, Older generation).

A deviant case, Sarthak (Older generation), felt that the middle-aged generation is almost at the stage of winding up their careers. Therefore, they want to possess everything. They have the tendency to manipulate things to their advantage. The middle-aged generation considers that their issues and work are more important, which makes them appear to be less considerate.

The middle-aged generation is mostly self-centered, especially those who are in the age- range of 38-45 years old. This is because people are trying to wind up by that time, so they would like to have everything set for them. It is like they want to have things their way. Less consideration is shown to others. I guess, their problems and work is of primary importance rather than conceding to someone else (Sarthak, Older generation).

Another deviant case was of the opinion that the experience of the middle-aged generation has resulted in the development of a fixed mindset. It is sometimes difficult to mold and influence them. They only accept perspectives that are in their line of thinking.
Once people reach later part of 30s or early 40s, flexibility reduces definitely. People of this age bracket have their own set of notions. It is bit difficult to change fixed mindset in a government set-up as people are bound by hierarchy and do not have their own mindset [cannot think independently] (Jerath, Older generation)

**Characteristics of the younger generation.** The older generation considers the younger generation to be aged between 20 and 30 years. Enthusiasm and energy are the striking features of this age. Howe and Strauss (2000) asserted that the younger generation, as compared to the middle-aged generation, is more optimistic, confident, and positive. The younger generation is deemed to be progress-driven. They believe in the future and consider themselves to be game changers. Vagrya (an older generation participant) said, ‘these people, as I said earlier, are in the age group of around 25 or so. Firstly, they are young, energetic; they have so many ideas and dreams. They want to do something that is new and different’.

(a) **Lack of experience.** Older generation is of the opinion that the young are new to the organization and hence lack in-depth knowledge. Lack of experience and knowledge has a negative impact on communication. Their confidence level is low, which reflects on their communications. However, on the positive side, the older generation feels that what the younger generation lacks in experience is offset by their fresh ideas and ability to look at things from multiple perspectives.

Commitment to the organization is low. The younger generation appears to be looking for better opportunities. They would prefer a lucrative job or a post-graduate degree to staying with the organization. Hence, they are termed as self-centered and materialistic. Benson and Brown (2011) and O’Bannon (2001) reported that the older generation’s willingness to quit the organization was low in comparison to the younger generation’s. Older generation argues that the self-centered attitude of the younger generation restricts the focus of their communications to individual needs (younger generation) rather than organizational requirements.

There is a lot of gap in the thinking process of the younger generation and ours when we were part of the younger generation. This difference is not only restricted to the thinking style but also in terms of money. One of the primary reasons for change in thinking style and shift in attitude towards money can be attributed to the fact that we were brought up in joint family. We came from a background, which inculcated values like touching people’s feet. Today, I don’t think people do this. They exchange hello and hi. I am not saying that it is wrong but what I am saying is that this is because of the environment – college and nuclear family. Secondly, they are more gadget and software friendly as they are more aware of it. None of the
person in the younger generation sleeps before 12 or 12:30am, which is not a good thing. This negatively impacts their communications at office, as they are more irritable in the mornings. By and large, if you ask, 95% of people in urban areas would say the same thing (R B Singh, Older generation).

(b) Non-conventional. On the encouraging side, the younger generation is ready to accept risks and challenges, which are reflected in their communication styles. As compared to the older generation when they were young, today’s younger generation is direct in approach and not afraid to take things head on. They are more verbal and the ability and willingness to speak their mind is superior. In their report on generation Y, Deloitte (2009) pointed out that the younger generation is ready to take challenges and risks; and work towards ambitious goals. They are ready to go the extra mile, something which the previous generations avoided.

But the change that I have noticed over the period of time is that they are far more verbal. Their ability to speak their mind is far more superior as compared to mine when I was of their age. Today’s generation do not face the kind of limitations, which we faced. Hence, they have no qualms about speaking in front of a person who is elder. This is the first major change that I have seen in last 5-7 years (Tushar, older generation-tracing back)

(c) Technology-Savvy. The younger generation is considered to have a high grasping power and the ability to learn easily and quickly. Thus, it is only to be expected that they would embrace technology and incorporate it into their everyday lives effortlessly. The older generation mentioned that even if the person from the younger generation wanted leave, he/she would prefer to message (SMS) it to the superior rather than make a formal application. The younger generation uses social media vigorously; they stay connected with colleagues of their through the various social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, etc.). On the negative side, they are viewed as being impatient and wanting quick results.

Technology has quickened the pace to such an extent that the younger generation tends to have overambitious expectations. With low patience levels they are unable to handle pressure. Impatience makes them bad listeners. They do not listen to the older generation. Salkowitz (2008) mentioned that the younger generation becomes impatient when technology does not meet their expectations. A common example is when employees are not able to respond to the younger generation’s technology-based communications (eg. responding to their email) in time. This makes them impatient. Their impatience affects other areas of work too.
As far as I am concerned, I can say that the younger generation is intelligent. They are more into gadgets and are definitely more intelligent than us. They are very fast and intelligent, but they lack the niche to accept the other side’s viewpoint. They are not patient. We were much more patient when we were part of the younger generation. We had patience. We were sincere and honest. They don’t listen because they have their own mindset. (Shripal, Older generation)

(d) Specialization Freaks. The older generation’s perception is that the younger generation is obsessed with specialization, tends to get disinterested when the issues being discussed do not come under their area of specialization. The older generation is also critical of educational institutions, as they do not focus on developing a holistic approach. They are not ready to accommodate work that does not fall in their purview of expertise.

Younger generation is focused on their area of expertise. They don’t want to move right and left. In some cases, it works to their advantage, they know their area in-depth. But in many cases it does not work. You know the kind of work we do in Parivartan. In a company like Parivartan where you are expected to do all sorts of jobs, there is dire need of being multidisciplinary. So you are expected to move right and left. You have to be more flexible. You have to be flexible to the kind of assignments that are been given to you. This kind of flexibility is missing in the younger generation. They tend to get disinterested if something out of their domain is given to them. They think this particular area of work is not at all relevant to their specialization, therefore ‘why should we do’ attitude is there. This kind of attitude tends to clamp them up, when they are given something, which is not really part of their specialization. I feel this leads to some sort of inferiority complex. They have an attitude like ‘Pata nahin yeh kya hain’ and tend to keep quiet. They are not that expressive in their communication. If they get the work, which is like 100% in tuned with their expectation and qualification, which is very rare then they are very expressive. However, this is not the usual case in Parivartan. Just to give one example, I passed out in 1983 with degree in electronics and probably I have done less of electronics engineering and more electrical and mechanical engineering. Younger generation is not prepared for this. It is because of two things. One reason is that their course structure has become more compressed. When we did our engineering, we had five-year course out of which in first two years there was no focus on our specialization. We were taught other disciplines. Whereas in the case of the younger generation from the very first semester they start focusing on their specialization and in the final year they are doing internship. Net result is that anything not related to their area is totally Greek to them. But when you are working in Parivartan, it is a multidisciplinary kind of climate, it comes in way to exposure to other area comes in handy. (Rajesh Kaul, Older generation).

Lastly, communication acts as a tool for the older generation to know and have better understanding about the younger generation.
**Social Identity as the older generation.** The older generation voiced its pride at being part of the generation they belong to. They also felt that every person should be proud of the generation they are part of, as it is a cyclical process. Older people tended to feel that their experience and commitment to organization sets them apart from the other generations. Their USP is experience. It helps to bring substance, clarity and precision to communication.

 [...] of course I am proud to be part of the older generation. In reality anybody should be proud of their generation. Why should I decry my age, I am extremely proud! I have had plenty of positive experience by being part of this generation. First and the foremost is that I have lived a successful career and aged through a lot of experience. This has made me a better person. Secondly, I share my experience with my immediate family and colleagues at office. I share my experience with lot of youngsters and help them. Younger generation’s ability to cope with pressure inside the work environment or outside is little less because of their high level of expectation. They want results very fast. It does influences communication in negative manner. When I was young any problem outside the workplace used to influence my communication with team but we had the ability to deal with it (Tushar, Older generation).

Experience helps the older generation to understand the unspoken part of communication. They are better positioned to anticipate and avert a possible communication breakdown.

*Experience does influence communication. We have lived a life with a lot of experiences, both at the workplace and outside. We are able to grasp what is unsaid because of our experience. What is said is very obvious but what is unsaid is difficult to decrypt, if you happen to understand then you gather more momentum. You tend to place your act and then react accordingly. May be as a youngster I would not have been aware of this but if today you don’t speak to me and just ask me five questions then I know that there is something, which is being unsaid. I need to respond to that also. (Abhishek, older generation)*

In addition, experience helps the older generation to avoid over-communicating. Older people feel that they know the fine point of when they must stop and leave it to recipient’s understanding. It was interesting that the older generation confessed that their experience negatively impacts the communication process. Due to their experience and long time with the organization, they admitted that inertia creeps in. Thus, at times they do not feel the need to communicate. Experience also makes them stubborn and averse to considering alternatives.

*Older age group (our) is less communicative. It is assumed that if somebody has been in job for 20-25 years they know what is expected of them. In addition, they know what can be expected from the peer group, subordinates or superiors. So*
inertia creeps in. Less communication takes place and more of ‘ok, I know it will happen this way or that way’. May be wrong or right we have developed up certain notions over a period of time so there is shade of stubbornness. They feel that this is the only way of moving forward (Jearth, older generation).

Older generation participants claimed to have demonstrated exceptional commitment to the organization. The commitment manifested in two forms: the number of years they have been with the particular organization and their sense of belonging. One of the reasons for their longer stay, as cited by them, stems from their middle-class upbringing and the state of Indian economy. At the start of their career, they were trying to establish themselves and support their family. This made sense for economic reasons and from the point of view of job security. On the other hand, the younger generation has grown up in an environment of relative material comfort, commitment to the organization is not necessary.

Costanza et al (2012), in their meta-analysis study on impact of generational differences on diverse organizational dimensions, reported that the older generation is less likely to leave their jobs in comparison to the younger generation. Kowske et al. (2010) reinforced the findings and asserted that the older generation people are more organization-oriented and committed whereas the younger generation is more ‘me focused’.

Earlier, in our times, many people used to join the organization and would continue with it for 20-30 years. Our reason was the closed economy that made job availability weak, but today people are joining an organization with an intention to leave soon for better opportunity. They are so impatient; you cannot say that they are wrong because lots of options are out there. They don’t feel about the organization and forget it easily. For them moving up the organization ladder and commanding respect is important. It is about exposure and options. Secondly, people of the older generation, by and large, are from the middle class so we used to think that if we stay here then there are more positives. But a guy from the younger generation will inherit all the basic things, so his way of thinking is going to be very different. My child has a house and car, for him this is not a worry because of what I have done; but for me then it was a worry. Awareness was not there at that time. (R B Singh, Older generation).

Older generation asserted that they are proud of their value system and commitment to ethics. Honesty is ingrained and is coupled with sincerity, respect, and humility. Older generation believes that strong family bonds and discipline is required to control human behaviour. They feel that living without boundaries and controls is a dangerous phenomenon.
I am definitely proud that I belong to the older generation and I value it. I am proud about the lifestyle that the older generation follows. There is certain amount of discipline. It is basically because of our culture. In comparison to the West, in India there is some culture which is family bond. Family bonds are a strong force and human behaviour requires some binding. Human behaviour and thought should have some boundaries, otherwise it will go out of control. Boundaries are something, which will discipline you. You would know what to do and what not to do. Younger generation till 16 and 17 year old is more sensitive, the moment they cross 17 they become free. So, unless you don’t make any boundary their thinking will be seamless. I told you one is discipline, sincerity, and honesty, another thing is human binding.  

I can say in 1970s there were joint family, people used to get settled and get married at 25 even if they were not earning. Today, at even the age of 32 people are not ready to get married. People in the younger generation are more insecure because they have higher expectations out of life (Shripal, Older generation).

It observed that the older generation ascribes a positive social identity to themselves. The participants felt that experience, organizational commitment and sound value systems places them in a better position than the middle-aged and the younger generations. Non-positive characteristics are not ascribed to the middle-aged generation; in deviant cases, they are seen to have fixed mindsets because of their experience and less considerate approach.

Non-positive characteristics ascribed to the younger generation are lack of experience, in-depth knowledge, and low levels of commitment (to organization). A social comparison of this nature aids in the construction of positive social identity. Contrary to the social identity theory, it was seen that the older generation ascribed positive characteristics to the younger and the middle-aged generations. They believe that the younger generation has high grasping and learning abilities; they are churning out fresh ideas and also able to take risks and face challenges. The middle-aged generation acts as a pivot because of their experience and maturity in their communication.

The question arises as to whether attributing positive characteristics to out-groups depreciates the positive social identity of the in-group? The study did not find evidence of such an outcome; however, further investigations are required.
Characterization of the Older and the Younger generations by the Middle-aged generation.

*Characteristics of the older generation.* The middle-aged shared their views about the older and the younger generations:

(a) **Experience as a double-edged sword.** The middle-aged generation’s opinion is that the experience of the older generation is experienced is the backbone of the employees. Their long and vast experience influences communication in a positive way. With experience on their side, the older generation handles communication in a structured and mature manner so as to increase its effectiveness. With the wisdom that comes from experience, the effectiveness of their communication increases. The middle-aged generation admits that it can learn a lot from the experience of the older generation.

They have to follow the system that is in place at Parikarma. Hence, they are fully aligned to the system and things have been thus over the years. So I don’t think and expect anything radically different from the older generation. Whatever is given to them they are fulfilling as their responsibility. This is my understanding because I cannot as such define the characteristics of the older generation. Whatever I see through my experience is that they are good and have sound understanding, especially in Parikarma. They give us a free hand in doing our work. Suppose you take some initiative, they are always there to give support. But, at the same time, their viewpoint needs to be respected. Suppose if there is any clash between the younger, the middle-aged and them, they take it positively. Experience means that they are more mature in their communication level; and the effectiveness of their communication is high. If you see a person who has been newly inducted into the system, his level of communication will depend on his understanding of the organization. Therefore his communication won’t be up to the mark. Since, the older generation is more experienced their communication is much more effective. Sometimes, as I told you, it depends upon the person. Sometimes a person might be rude. Individual differences are always there (Dutta, Middle-aged generation).

However, due to their experience, the older generation is rigid about their ideas and notions and reluctant to change even if the alternative ideas are feasible. This increases the probability of communication divide. Rigidity in the older generation is shaped by their conservative approach; it tends to kill new ideas and thinking, creativity and restricts the risk taking ability of middle-aged generation.

*Our views do not match. My thinking would be that this should be like this and his thinking might be altogether different. They have a mindset that since ‘we are doing a given thing from many years therefore it is right’. In their view since they are here for so many years things so things are going to be like this. They feel it is part of*
system and align with the system. Hence, we can say they are very rigid with their views. It is a kind of generation gap only (Ratan, Middle-aged generation).

(b) Non-familiarity with technology. Middle-aged generation considers the older generation to be non-familiar with and not conversant with technology. They are not abreast with the recent developments in relation to technology and are reluctant to adopt changes. This increases their dependency on the middle-aged and the younger generations. Participants of the middle-aged generation were of the opinion that the older generation is either hesitant to adopt technology or take a long time to adapt. Alm, Gregor, and Newell (2002) asserted that older workers are likely to be hesitant to adopt technology. Therefore, a system to provide proper training and assistance should be in place to encourage the older generation to embrace technology.

Older generation in today’s world is bit out of touch. I feel that they are not adept at computers and they are directly dependent on their subordinates and exercise power by virtual networking. Their dependence increases to the extent that the younger generations feels exploited and unable to focus on their work(Udyaan, Middle-aged generation).

(c) Decline in Mental and Physical faculties. The middle-aged generation also felt that the older generation is approaching retirement age and their physical abilities are declining. However, this is compensated by their discipline, work ethics and the ability to fulfill responsibilities. On the other hand, they are also charged with using procedures to their convenience to deflect blame and accountability. They develop a negative thinking approach (ability to delay work by using rules and regulations).

They are not open to discussion. Such a kind of behaviour results in negative thinking in them. When we are given a case, we try and see how we can help the person. I am talking of my role as the HR person and role of my colleagues of my department. So, I will try and see how I can help the person. When I think about the older generation, what I think is that when a person approaches them (because in HR you have various issues, somebody might have missed the claim or made wrong claim, somebody might have got lower payment of bonus) their perspective towards the issue is that the person who is claiming it is wrong. So, they try and use the rules in such a way that the person is not benefitted. They have a negative approach (Meeta, Middle-aged generation).
Characteristics of the younger generation. The middle-aged generation’s perceptions about the younger generation are largely about their lack of experience and the need to give direction to their talents. Below are characteristics attached by the middle-aged generation to the younger generation.

(a) Lack of experience. In the opinion of the middle-aged, being young of age gives makes the younger generation naturally dynamic. Age is also a strong motivator. Meeta (Middle-aged generation) states ‘First of all younger generation is enthusiastic and proactive. They have new ideas, are positive in their approach and open to discussion’.

However, experience comes with age. The lack of experience is the reason they are unable to look at matters from different perspectives and foresee the outcomes of certain actions. They are unable to keep the official separate from the non-official, which results in casual approach to communication. The level of commitment towards the organization is low. Lub et al. (2011) concluded that the younger generation demonstrates lower level of organizational commitment in comparison to elder generations. Older and the middle-aged generations have higher levels of continuity in their commitment towards the organization.

(b) Talent needs direction. Younger generation is viewed as agile, energetic and proactive, brimming with ideas and having a strong urge to learn. With the desire to learn, the younger generation attempts to bring in clarity to their communication and thought process. An abundance of fresh ideas and insights is what the younger
generation brings to the issue (Deloitte, 2009). Middle-aged generation claimed that they help the younger generation overcome their lack of experience. They have energy and ideas, which need to be channelized in the right direction. The younger generation is open to discussions and takes risks that positively influence the communication process. Younger generation is more comfortable when conversing with their seniors (age and position). They are not bound by conventional societal norms.

“Although they are better educated, more techno-savvy, and quicker to adapt than those who have come before them, they refuse to blindly conform to traditional standards and time-honored institutions. Instead, they boldly ask, ‘Why?’” (Eric Chester from “Employing Generation Why?, Deloitte, 2005: 4)

The Younger generation is active and has a lot of energy. I have seen that, when the younger generation joins the organization they have the energy to initiate new things. 95-99% of the younger generation wants to do something new and innovative. After 10-15 years of their stay in the organization their role changes and by that time, they have families. As family responsibilities grow, the passion at work diminishes. Since they want to do something new, they are open to communicating with senior officers. Many things, which are not told to them in their routine jobs, they come forward with proposals and ideas. These are their initiatives. For instance, we have a GT, she has started a e-newsletter on her own. Nobody told her to. We are publishing it every week on our intranet (Rakesh, Middle-aged generation).

(c) Technology savvy. The younger generation is tech-savvy; technology is a language for them. They effortlessly incorporate technology in their day-to-day tasks. However, technology has also influenced communication in a negative way. The younger generation has become non-communicative and often withholds their views. They prefer using technology to find solutions rather than communicating with people. The extent of face-to-face communication has reduced drastically due to technology; and as a result, the emotional component has gone down. Younger generation has started using abbreviations to communicate and poor grammar usage causes embarrassment, especially in the presence of clients. However, this shortcoming does not undermine the advantages of technology.

They are IT savvy and smart. They may not be very wise, but they are smart in day-to-day affairs. My view is that they are not very communicative in the traditional sense. When I was part of the younger generation, I used to go to my seniors and experienced older generation person and share my views. I think they withhold their views. They use short cuts in their words while communicating. Their English would
not be grammatically correct. They might be using short-terms with their own generation but for me they are not very communicative because they do not share their feelings, ...may be they are communicating their feeling to their friends (Lal, Middle-aged generation).

**Social Identity as the Middle-aged generation.** The middle-aged generation asserted their pride at being part of their generation. Participants of the middle-aged generation viewed their ability to strike a balance between the older generation and the younger generations makes them most valued.

Whether younger, senior or the middle generation it is an evolution that everybody has to go through. Starting with the younger generation, I have gone through the younger generation process, at that time I kept in mind that learning curve is going to be high and it will help me to gather positive experiences as I go along. As we move along, our knowledge gets enriched and in such case if we move to the older generation the experience and knowledge enrichment continues. This will give us more flexibility to communicate (Vinay, Older generation).

The salient features of the middle-aged employees, of which they are proud, are that they appear to have the best of both worlds (the older and the younger generations). This makes them a balanced generation. In comparison to the younger generation, the middle-aged generation does not get swayed by the lure of technology like the younger employees do. They do not overindulge in its use. Middle-aged generation is more experienced, has more knowledge and regards technology as a useful tool and not to be casually played with.

People of my generation should be proud of the fact that they belong to middle-aged generation because they have view of both the worlds. Therefore, it is ok and comfortable to be part of this generation. USP of the middle-aged generation is that we have exposure to print media as well as the electronic media. We can decipher when there is an overdose of technology-based medium. On the other hand, the younger generation is not able to decipher whether overdose of technology is taking place. Sometimes they get carried away. It helps in balancing out things. We can say in today’s style of communication, where there is too much of peskiness, we don’t have leaning towards any specific style. We are comfortable with print and electronic media. Younger generation is not that comfortable with the paperwork. They feel that paperwork is just a formality. However all said and done, in a government organization paperwork is a part of responsibility. Therefore, it cannot be obliterated (Udyaan, Middle-aged generation).

Middle-aged generation participants claimed that they were more comfortable with the older generation’s style of communication (written-based communication), which is usually in the paper form, than with the younger generation’s approach. They
also considered themselves to be more aggressive and efficient planners than the older generation. Their ability to learn is stronger than the older generation’s. Kalyan, a middle-aged generation participant said that ‘USP of the middle-aged generation is the blend of both experience and technology; and their new ideas and new initiatives’.

This characterization by the middle-aged generation shows that they are able to act as the bridge between the older and younger generations. They are able to reconcile to a large extent the differences in the perceptions of the two generations about each other. The ease with which the middle-aged accomplishes this may possibly have to do with the realization that they were young till recently and that they old age is not very far off. Having families to look after may also have contributed to more rounded perspectives.

oh! I have never thought about that. It comes more to valuing the company and job […] yes, I am happy to belong to this generation. I will tell you that my generation does not belong to the older generation and not that much to the younger generation it falls in between. I have already completed 12-13 years here. How it is different from the younger generation, I would say that the younger generation is little bit casual in their attitude, we are less so. We take things and take our work seriously. This is the difference that I found with the younger generation, who has newly joined to the organization. If I compare our group to the older generation, the middle-aged generation is more planned and has more vision. We look at the future, I mean, what repercussions will there be of our actions. Foresight may be, I consider it as our USP. We know that if we do this, this is what is going to happen to the company. We can analyze the scenario and understand it better (Meeta, Middle-aged generation).

However, Ajay took a deviant stand on the middle-aged generation’s identity. He feels that his generation faces an existential crisis. They are in a state of suspension between the older and the younger generations. They are struggling to keep up the older generation in experience and, at the same time, is trying to be tuned in to the younger generation.

it is not possible to paint in black and white when the picture is actually grey. Everything has some positives and certain negatives. Every generation has its own challenges and you grow with it. If you take it otherwise; if you feel all these things are drawbacks, that is, you are basically being stretched between two generations. It may look as a drawback; but you should look at it as a challenge and as a growing process. However, the middle-aged generation is facing a kind of dilemma. Basically middle-aged generation is not lying with the younger generation and is not able to keep up with them physically and mentally. Mental faculties have started declining and he (the middle-aged generation) still has not achieved enough wisdom. So he is looking at his peers or up at seniors. So these are the two challenges: the wisdom of the older generation and to keep up with the younger
generation is difficult. Communication is basically a challenge for everybody; even
the younger generation faces the heat. There is a standard dialogue that we hear
from the younger generation that ‘ki hum kuch samajh te nahi hain’. So, it is an
ongoing process right now. Nothing new is ther. (Ajay, Middle-aged generation)

Thus, it is evident that the middle-aged generation indulges in rigorous social
comparisons to ascribe themselves a positive social identity. They compare their
generation with the older and younger generations on the parameters that accentuate
positive aspects of their identity. The middle-aged also consider their generation to be
a balanced one. They possess the key attributes of both the generations, which make
them a better equipped group. They view both generations positively, valuing the
experience of the older, and the agility and dynamism of the younger.

There were a few non-positive characteristics, too. The older generation was seen
as too rigid and resistant to new ideas, and not conversant with technology. Younger
generation is less experienced, casual in their approach, and tended to overuse
technology. The middle-aged ascribed positive characteristics to the older and the
younger generations, but they did not see the necessity to change their group
membership (identify with the other generation).

Characterization of the Older and the Middle-aged generations by the Younger
generation

Characteristics of the older generation

(a) Experience as a double-edged sword. Younger generation places persons in the
age range of late 40s and above in the older generation. They saw experience as
the salient characteristic of the older generation. Wisdom is gained from
experience, which is visible in their thinking. Experience helps to guide the
younger people. The younger generation respects and has faith in the experience
of the older generation because they believe that knowledge comes with
experience. The younger generations participants readily conceded that they learn
immensely from the older generation’s experience. They also found the older
generation as forthcoming in sharing their experiences (Wok & Hashim, 2012).

Experience is also seen as a prerequisite for effective communication. The
younger generation considered older people to have a more nuanced worldview
and are able to cover and compensate for younger generation’s mistakes. This is
also why, sometimes, they are termed as father figure. Older people weigh the pros and cons before taking a decision.

Their experience is the striking feature. They have a better understanding of the world as compared to us. The age gap is there, but they have done extensive work and have coped with difficult and testing times. They could have reached this level only after coping with difficulties. They have more experience than us. In my mind there are certain things to know from them, which we can, but only if we interact with them. I have learnt a lot of things from them. Their level of thinking is high as compared to us because, right now, I am not so much experienced. In addition, he has been here for 20-25 years, so the level of thinking of the older generation is going to be different from ours. Therefore, it is always nice to interact with such people (Swapnil, Younger generation).

Experience is also seen to have a negative side; it helps to bring in a conventional and rigid approach. The younger generation felt that the older generation is narrow minded and does not want to experiment. If a decision is taken, they will stick to it and not consider other options. Rigidity does not allow scope for improvement or changes in the communication process. The ability and willingness of the older generation to adjust and accommodate reduces with age. This creates barriers in the minds of the younger generation in asking questions of the older generation.

Whatever you say, the older generation will stick to their decision. Suppose a work is going on, if we suggest that can we do it in this way they won’t agree with it. They will say that ‘we have a format and you have to follow it’. We know that format will make the work more hectic but they still won’t want to accept it. They want to stick to the format and their way of thinking; and they want us to accommodate (Kiran, Younger generation).

They are conventional because of their experience. They have a particular way of doing things and do not want to change. See, if you say that someone is conventional and has a particular way of doing things it means that they are sure about what they say. They also believe that when they communicate something, it should be done exactly the way they want, and without any changes. There are times when you can apply your thinking process. I guess, it depends upon the person also (Shantaram, Younger generation).

They are not really ready to adopt changes. Suggestions don’t come easily to them as they have developed some patterns over the years and they will go by them. If we talk about the inter-departmental thing, there are certain ways which can work easier, but they will continue with their own way. So, they are not receptive to change and suggestions. (Nagendera, Younger generation)
(b) **Procedure oriented and non-conversant with technology.** The older generation people are process-oriented and strictly follow the rulebook. On occasions, this can be an obstacle and the communication time increases. The advent of technology began the time of the middle-aged generation and became indispensable for the younger generation. Older generation is not conversant with technology and is unwilling to make the time and effort to improve their familiarity with it. They prefer verbal communication to technology-based communication.

Most of the communications within organization take place on ERP but the older generation is not proactive in its use, which delays work. Debosmita (younger generation) said, ‘Definitely. Being process-oriented and following the rulebook comes in the way they communicate. I won’t say that it deteriorates the communication; I would say that it increases the time duration of the communication and the entire activity is getting enhanced’. Another younger generation participant, Deepti, said, ‘their computer knowledge is a bit deficient as compared to the younger generation’s. All these technologies were developed in our era as a result of which we are better conversant with the technology and they are not. Older generation has less knowledge when it comes to technology’.

**Characteristics of the middle-aged generation.**

(a) **A balanced generation that bridges the old and the young.** The middle-aged generation is the bridge between two opposing generations. Middle-aged generation facilitates the smooth flow of information one generation (generally, the older) to the other (the younger generation). The middle-aged generation is able to learn from both is able to adjust to the needs of either. Rakesh (younger generation) said, ‘they (middle-aged generation) are moving forward and getting into the experienced bracket of workforce. They get to learn from people who are under them in term of age and also learn from the older generation people of their department’.

I find them to be balanced. The reason is, they are the liaison between the older and the younger generation. They take the message from the older generation, filter it and put it across in a manner that the other generation is able to understand. However, in the process, there is a chance of the content getting modified. It does happen at times that, by the time the work given by the older generation is conveyed to the younger generation, a lot of modification has taken place. It could lead to repetitive work (Shantaram, Younger generation).
The middle-aged generation can be termed as the ‘golden generation’ as they are well-versed with technology and have the experience to back them up. The younger generation participants found the middle-aged generation to be more interactive and cooperative as compared to the older generation. As a result the younger generation is able to have better personal and professional communications with them. Younger generation finds themselves more open and less nervous when communicating with the middle-aged generation than they are with the older generation. The relationship shared between the younger and the middle-aged generations is based on the premise that they shared similar events and experiences. Both generations have experienced the impact of LPG.

*I am able to relate more with the middle-aged. They have being exposed to a lot of things that our generation has also been exposed to. At the same time, they are a lot of things that are part of the earlier generations. You don’t know people over 30 years of age; in that sense the middle-aged generation acts as a sort of a connection. We can be pallier with them. We can talk to them about varied stuff. We can be more open with them; we can expect them to understand and solve our problem. At the same time, they can also guide us through their experiences. In that sense, my past experience with them is that they have been very helpful and I have had a good relationship with them. It is easier to talk to them; they understand us better as compared to the older generation. This may be because what you (we) are facing right now they might have faced 10-15 years from now. Middle-aged generation’s experience is more recent as compared to someone who is, like, 50-55. Also, they understand us more because their kids are growing up now and have experienced globalization. So they are able to understand the mentality of younger generation* (Amit, younger generation)

**Social identity as the Younger generation.** The participants were proud to be part of the younger generation. They feel that belonging to one generation is part of life’s process and one day they will belong to the older generation. The younger generation considers that their open-mindedness, unconventional approach and short learning curve sets them apart from the other generations. Ramandeep (younger generation) said, ‘obviously we are proud. After 10 years we have to be proud of the fact that we are part of middle-aged generation and then we have to proud of the fact that we are proud of older generation’.

Being open-minded is the USP of the younger generation. They are open to ideas, views, and are not afraid to challenge the traditional/conventional approach. Younger generation respects rules and regulations but does not get tied down by them. The
younger generation is able to think from multiple perspectives and is able to come up with creative solutions. They are more flexible, agile and accommodative. Experience is a baggage and colours the vision. Being less experienced makes them think differently.

If you are open minded, you are able to identify the problem. You are not a single-track person, you must try to think out of the box. You try to come with different solutions. When you come out with different solutions then you can express them in different languages also. Even a different syntax leads to simplifying of the problems (Debosmita, Younger generation).

We have the potential to change mindset, if we want to continue in this way. The younger generation means new approach. Since they (other generations) are at the different stage of their life, the way we approach the work and how to get the work done is going to be different from others. Older generation’s approach can be considered as bit conservative, that is, they want to evaluate pros and cons before they take a decision. Even if they take decision they want to be absolutely sure that it should not come back to them, if the decision goes wrong. This is not the primary purpose of the younger generation. We want to get the work done; obviously with some logic behind our approach, but the mindset is positive. Mindset is to get the work done and not halt the work (Samrat, younger generation).

First thing is that we are open to many ideas. I can experiment because I don’t know things, which is almost equal to open-mindedness. Next thing is the way we mingle. In the context of India, I see my parents and the middle-aged generation they have different set of rules. They had some particular rules and set form beliefs for each other. When it comes to this generation there are no such rigid rules. We don’t have mindset wherein we impose our mindset or beliefs on other despite knowing the reality. We can mingle; when it comes to teamwork we can contribute. There are no rules, we are ok with anyway, and at the same time coordination is there. See, if a person is experienced he generally tends to be biased because of experience. So, over a period of time, he has fixed notions/ideas, which the younger generation doesn’t. We look at various options because nothing is fixed in our minds. We experiment with things and the ideas ultimately come. This may not happen with the middle-aged or the older generation. They are very experienced. Maybe we also will become like them when reach that stage. But as of today, I can see that I want to be as open as possible (Kishore, younger generation).

The younger generation is eager to learn and their learning curve is going to be high than that of other two generation. They feel that their generation can bring in change; they feel less burdened (family issues, etc.).

See, one thing is that I am open to learning; I am not saying that the older generation is not. My whole life is ahead of me so it is easier for me to explore and learn new things. For example, I learned Spanish. My company offered the course and I was one of few who were interested in learning Spanish. You cannot expect the same from the older generation as they have attained their goals and have settled. It is not going to make much difference to them if they learn some other
language. It does make a difference to me. For example, take my learning Spanish. It might not help me immediately, because I don’t have client or a vendor who speaks Spanish. But might help me in future if I have to work in Latin American market. (Anuj, Younger generation).

This is the time when we can test ourselves a lot. After sometime, it will be difficult as we will have families, there will be several other things, which will affect our lives. Right now we are free to apply ourselves to fullest. We should proud of it. These are the 5 or 6 years that we can use for ourselves to the fullest (Ramandeep, younger generation).

These young people have witnessed the innovatory changes brought about by technology. The younger generation is at complete ease with technology, which makes others dependent on them. This gives young people an advantage over the other generations. Often, the older generation needs the help of the younger generation on the use of technology in day-to-day functioning. Technology helps them to make communications precise and speeds the communication process. The amount of time and excess content that is communicated in face-to-face communication gets avoided when technology-based communication is adopted.

It can thus be seen that that the younger generation locates a positive social identity for their group. The dominant feeling is that having an open-mindset and learning approach is a positive differentiator for their generation. Positive attributes are ascribed to the older and middle-aged generations. The older generation has abundant experience and the middle-aged generation acts as a bridge between them and the older generation. Non-positive characteristics are ascribed to the older generation, but not to the middle-aged. Due to which the younger generation indulges in rigorous social comparison with the older generation only.

The foregoing discussion showed that every generation had a strong and positive social identity for itself. For this reason, changes of in-group membership were not observed. The nature of social comparison is at a variance from the dominant notion (as published literature shows) in that generations actually ascribe positive characteristics to other generations while, at the same time, drawing positive identification for themselves generation.
Comparison of Generational Classification with Previous Works

In the previous sections, Srinivsan (2012), Erickson (2009) and Ghosh and Chaudhuri (2009) have defined generational cohorts in the Indian context. The table below shows generational classification in the Indian context.

Generational classification – Study 1 Roongrerngsuke, 2010 and Study 2 Erickson, 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational classification</th>
<th>Study 1 Roongrerngsuke, 2010</th>
<th>Study 2 Erickson, 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>1922–1945/1946 (er) 1940–1955</td>
<td>Birth years and events/influencers: British rule, British education system, food crisis, Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violence, civil disobedience campaign for independence, end of British Raj, Gandhi’s assassination and the first Kashmir war, Indo-Pakistan war of 1947.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X/Generals</td>
<td>1950–1974/1975 (er) 1975–1990</td>
<td>Development of large middle class, increased demand and production of consumer goods, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s economic liberalisation, reform policies and growth, educational powerhouse, development of science and technology, communal violence, assassination of Indira Gandhi, respected source of IT talent,string of Indian companies in Forbes global.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Srinivasan (2012:54)

Generational classification- Study 3 ( Ghosh & Chaudhari, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational classification</th>
<th>Study 3 Ghosh &amp; Chaudhari, 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>1947–1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>1970–1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Y</td>
<td>1990–2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Integrators</th>
<th>Y2K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialist, shy, obedient, national pride, stressing social conformity, technophobic, avid savers</td>
<td>Less conservative, tech savvy, ambition of becoming rich, government jobs no longer attractive</td>
<td>Loan is not considered a liability and is taken on credit, tech savvy and adept, value work-life balance and profession, fearless of aspirations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Srinivasan (2012:54)
These tables show that Roongrerngsuke (2010) and Erickson (2009) developed a nuanced classification of generation along lines similar to the Western classification and identified four generation: Traditionalist, Baby boomer, Generation X and Generation Y. On the other hand, Ghosh and Chaudhuri (2009) have reclassified the four generations into three by increasing the age range of the generations. Srinivasan (2012) has identified five generations: Veterans, Free-Gens, Gen X, E gen, and Gen Y.
The Classification of generations based on the present study is shown in the table below.

**Table 3.4 Classification of generation on the basis of the data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>Older generation</th>
<th>Middle-aged generation</th>
<th>Younger generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant events</td>
<td>• Indo-Pak war (1972), emergency in the late 1970s and formation of Janta Party.</td>
<td>• Assassination of Indira Gandhi, Mandal commission, the Bofors Scam.</td>
<td>• Godhra and Babri Masjid riots, Scams and the concept of coalition government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other influencers</td>
<td>• Brought up in a Joint family setup.</td>
<td>• Both family structures (joint and nuclear) were popular.</td>
<td>• Brought up in a nuclear household.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Career ambition was to become an engineer or a doctor.</td>
<td>• More career opportunities.</td>
<td>• Aspire to gain an MBA or a PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• India winning the Cricket World Cup in 1983, The Delhi Asian Games of 1982; and the rivalry between John McEnroe and Bjorn Borg in Tennis</td>
<td>• Cricket world cup 1996, tennis rivalry between Monica Seles and Steffi Graff.</td>
<td>• India winning 20-20 world cup, the Sachin Tendulkar era, Nadal and Federer rivalry, India reaching the 2003 world cup finals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics (related to communication)</td>
<td>• Experienced, not conversant with technology, organizational commitment is high.</td>
<td>• Balanced generation-experience, mature, and adept with technology.</td>
<td>• Lacks experience, non-conventional (challenges existing norms), technology savvy, focus on specialization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, the three generations have been identified: older, middle-aged and the younger generations rather than four or five. There are several reasons for this. First, if we assume that a person joins an organization at the age of 21 and will be retiring at the age of 58 years, he (or she) will be a part of the workforce for 37 years. This working span was the basis on which an age range of 10 years was arrived at for classifying the generations. Doing so also reduces the chances of generation overlap.
Also, in a context-laden culture like India’s, communication is governed by several do’s and don’ts. A smaller age range would hinder the aim of capturing the generational differences in communication as the shifts cannot be tapped. There is a greater likelihood of convergence than divergence with the classification adopted. Lastly, and most important, the present study is about people at the workplace. Therefore traditionalists, Veterans or Baby boomers, who were born in the period 1940s-1953 would have retired and have thus been excluded from this study.

A certain degree of convergence is apparent from the description of the three generations and that of extant studies. Context of Gen X/Intergrators and Gen Y/ Y2K matches the contexts of middle-aged and the younger generation respectively. The findings of the current study and that in published works show that the state of that economy and technology played a significant role. Therefore, this study may be considered a validation of previous works in the Indian context.

Extant work in the Indian context identified generational characteristics in general. However, the present study has identified generational characteristics related to communication. Previous works have contextualized on the basis of literature (secondary data). The present study contributes significantly by placing and contextualizing generations on the basis of primary data.

**Implications**

The present study contributes to the explanation of Karl Mannheim’s theory by confirming the tripartite representation of generation. The contribution to theory is the contextualization of generation specific to India. The study highlights the socio-cultural context in which these generations were socialized and their contribution to making them a generational unit. As opposed to the Western approach, which is the normal practice, this study is an attempt to classify generation appropriate to the Indian context.
The present study also explains social identity theory. It confirms to certain sections of the social identity theory. The study reaffirms that individuals indulge in social categorization and social comparison to draw a positive social identity and strive to maintain positive group distinctiveness. The contributions of the present research are indicative of divergences from social identity theory. These divergences need to be tested in the field and may be the scope for future studies. Firstly, during the process of social identification in-groups attach positive characteristics to out-groups. However, this does not pose a challenge to positive group distinctiveness of the in-group. When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group or join more positively distinct group and/or seek to make their existing group more positively distinct (Tajfel and Turner, 1979:40). The participants in the present study did not change their group membership. The perception of inferiority and superiority in status was also not observed. Therefore, it is not necessary that social comparison and positive/negative social identity would translate into formation of superior and inferior groups.

Summary

This study is a significant contribution to existing knowledge by validating and explaining theory. Generation was defined on the basis of both its biological (birth year) and sociological (socio-cultural context) components. The defining event for the older generation is the pre-liberalization phase characterized by the closed and socialist economy. Middle-aged generation is defined by the advent of LPG; and the younger generation is defined by technology/IT revolution, which was followed by the economic recession. The importance of socio-cultural context and its impact on the participants was discussed while defining generation. All the three generations strongly identified with their generation and different from the other generations to maintain positive social identity.

The next chapter discusses the various features of intergenerational communication like effectiveness, satisfaction, styles, and channels.