

THE MEANING OF LIFE AT 20 YEARS OLD. GENERATION Z CONSUMERS

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Abstract: *We live in a digital society where people can use their smartphones daily and just by a click, everything can be controlled and performed. As long as our world improves we as humans strive to find out more about life and the meaning of it. Every day we create new connections, share emotions with family and friends, but do we have time to think about the meaning of our lives? This research aims to explore how Z Generation consumers understand their meaning in life. Z Generation, with the help of technologies, are more capable to look for different definitions about this concept than other generations. The purpose of our paper is to understand better the opinion of the Z Generation about this subject and how their choice as consumers is affected by their perception. The results and conclusions are obtained with the help of a qualitative research conducted on students of Iasi universities with a focus on their perceptions and opinions regarding the meaning of life.*

Keywords: *meaning in life; Z Generation consumers; youngsters values.*

JEL Classification: *D11; D19; D31.*

1. Ideas and concepts of the meaning in life

As human beings we always try to develop and understand different aspects of our life. Nowadays people discover the real meaning of the natural disasters, they focus on medical diagnoses (Berkup, 2022), develop new strategies about the earth, moon and also through all experiences and moments they strive to understand the meaning of their own lives (Wolf, 2010). We as humans depend very much on the people that are surrounding us, we live and share emotions every single day and that is the main source of meaning in life (King and Hicks, 2021).

It is difficult to give a definition. We have to understand that people are different, each of us having a different perception of life. There aren't two people with the same thinking. In general other people, the nature, our activities give a meaning to our lives and this can serve as anchors for having any interest in the world at all (Krok, 2018). The question of meaning in life is one of the most fundamental questions in life. That meaning is a matter of feelings and experiences, not of

physical possessions. It is the way we talk about things, not a feature of things themselves (Tutiasri and Febriyanti, 2021). On this theory, we can make life meaningful by the way we talk about it, and it cannot have a precise meaning for everyone. Living a life surrounded with people that share with us emotions and moments is what we are looking for our entire life and gives us a meaning.

We are all hungry for meaning, for purpose, for the feeling that our life is worth more than the sum of its parts (Schnell, 2020). Luckily, humans are resourceful- we have infinite ways of finding meaning, and infinite potential sources of meaning. We can find meaning in every scenario, every event, every occurrence, and every context (Berkup, 2022). We can find meaning in the sublime, in the absurd, in the dull and dreary, and in the perfectly wretched in life (King and Hicks, 2021). The meaning of life can change from day to day, from hour and hour but the most important thing is the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment (Wolf, 2010). We share emotions, moments and ideas every day, we fall in love and make the other person the sense of our life, in other words we depend physical and psychological by people that surrounds us Krok, 2018). Happiness can be a well-defined concept in life and it can be derived from several sources, such as engagement in productive and meaningful activities, doing a good deed, loving a significant other or producing a creative product. We can ask ourselves if happiness can give so much meaning to our life and for sure the answer is yes, happy people, at any age, get more out of life because they put more into it (Berkup, 2022). Happy people are social, they do what they enjoy and enjoy what they do with planning and organizing all the things around. Finding meaning and purpose in life leads to happiness, not the other way around.

2. Characteristics of Z consumers

Through generations the concept of living a happy and meaningful life did not change at all, since ancient time we share emotions, moments and our behaviour depends on things that happen around us (Seemiller and Grace, 2018).

The Z Generation are the children of the Internet, often known as the Digital Generation. Is made up of people born after 1995 (Seemiller and Grace, 2019). One of the wonderful characteristics that Internet technology has bestowed on this generation is their ability to be engaged in multiple subjects at once. The Z Generation like activities and games that express different themselves (Seemiller and Grace, 2017). Socializing over the Internet, consuming quickly, practicality and speed, interactivity, efficiency, dissatisfaction, and being result-oriented are among their most important traits (Hainline et al., 2010). They believe that anything is possible in the world and that they can accomplish anything with their equipment (Gaidhani, Arora and Sharma, 2019). They have a high level of self-reliance (Loveland, 2017). They are usually efficient and creative. Because of enhanced technology, they are projected to have higher living standards, live longer, and be wealthier than earlier generations (Hoch, 2019). The Z Generation are still studying today. In comparison to past generations, kids begin their education at a younger

age and receive a more developed and planned education. They may reap the benefits of the education they get in the workplace.

Generation Z cares about the collective good and well-being. One of the best core values is that they care about other groups and formal volunteering (Loveland, 2017). They believe more about action than words and they are continually sharing experiences (Seemiller and Grace, 2019). Being an open-minded generation, the freedom of expression is vital, they always strive to support people and groups that are authentic and this is why it is important to have the freedom as desired (Hoch, 2019).

Does technology influence the meaning of life for Gen Z? The answer is yes. It influences their behaviour, mind, manners, hobbies, appearance, clothing, style and education (Hoch, 2019). The thing that they have to understand is how technology should influence their life and they choose the positive or the negative manner. Technology and social media will always improve and this is not in their hands to stop it, but they can choose to not pay attention and always be positive and influenced only by good things that can rise their confidence and make themselves better than yesterday.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to explore the opinion of the Z Generation students about the concept of meaning in life.

The main objective is to analyze the concept of meaning in life from the eyes of Iasi University students and also how they experience these meaning in life.

In order to reach this objective we have formulated several secondary objectives:

- To find out what Z generation students understand by the concept of meaning in life.
- To identify how they experience and share their meanings of life.
- To explore the students' meaning of life as graduating the university.
- To discover what are they doing to get closer to the meaning in life.
- To determine what do they expect to be the meaning of life five years after graduating the university

This research is a qualitative one, based on interviews where respondents shared their opinions and experiences. Due to this pandemic situation, we used the online method, the research instrument being the interview guide that includes multiple and open questions. Choosing a qualitative method made us understood better people's behavior and thinking by sharing anonymous information based on their own life. The structure of the interview guide is based on defining the concept of the meaning in life through the eyes of students. Their experiences and beliefs will help me write proper interpretations and conclusions.

The sample was composed by 20 students, both employed or unemployed at the moment of the interview, 12 females and 8 males, aged between 18 to 24 years old. All of them were adults from the Z Generation, 19 being in a relationship and only

one of them single. The meeting were conducted online and the average time to complete them was 30 minutes.

4. Results

The findings of our research will be presented by each one of our five objectives using frequencies tables.

The first objective implies finding out the concept of the meaning in life explained by students. In the table no. 1 are presented the results.

Table no 1: The words frequency regarding the concept of meaning in life

Word	Frequency
Family	5
Career	4
Happiness	4
Money	4
Love	3
Values	3
Health	1
Purpose	1
Travelling	1

Source: own computing data

The purpose of the *first objective* is to understand students perception of the concept of meaning in life. Most of the respondents opted for family, career and happiness. Students also wrote about values, love, friends, being healthy and having a purpose in life. Evaluating the answers most of students define the concept of meaning in life by sharing their values, by taking care of family and friends, by love and being loved. This shows the fact that this generation depends of people that are sharing emotions with them. They like being surrounded by people who loves and supports them every single day. The word *family* has a 5 times frequency, so the family members are very important for students. On the other hand, we can see answers like *money* and work, which are also vital for students. *Money* has a frequency of 4 times and this emphasize the desire of being independent and grow up in life. Another frequent word was *values*. Students stand for things that real matters and value important things. Living a meaningful life for them means achieve all the goals proposed, be aware of their values, have a healthy family, be surrounded of friends and work hard for growing in career and make money. This study exposed some effects for the women interviewed: the meaning in life is established through broader and social values of work and life, like caring for others and respect. Women stand for family, happiness and health. By contrast, the male counterparts interviewed revealed the meaning in life in quantitative terms like: career, financial independence and work.

For *the second objective* we aimed identifying how students experience and share their meanings of life. Most of the respondents stand for sharing emotions every day and working hard for achieving goals. It is really important that students understand the fact that they have to work hard to go further in life. Some of the respondents recognized the fact that they want money to travel. Actually, the entire research is almost composed on two sides: *family* and *money*. Most of students said that they want all of these things together, for some of them *career* goes first. *Love* is another element for living a meaningful life. In order to create positive connections, they share love and receive it back. All these elements help each other to live a meaningful life. We can notice here that students are grateful for everything they have and try to do their best. They are conscious that everything starts from them, through realities, step by step getting far.

The third objective emphasize the meaning of life as graduating the university. In table no. 2 we present the mentioned words that describe the meaning of life as perceived in the moment of finishing the university studies.

Table no. 2 The words frequency regarding the meaning of life as graduating the university.

Word	Frequency
Job	8
Career	4
Business	2
Family	1
Vacation	1

Source: own computing data

For students the meaning in life, as graduating the university, means finding a well-paid job or opening their own business in order to grow in career. Most of the answers show that the respondents chose to be financial independent by finding a job full of opportunities. Due to this point, students are aware that the next step is starting the grownup life. Moreover, they realize that working hard lead to success. We observed through answers that respondents have big expectations in finding a suitable job that can fit all the requirements. By sharing these opinions and beliefs, we can say for sure that as graduating the university most of students will look for a well-paid job and get involved in different activities. Other words that were less frequent than previous ones are family and vacation. Beside the working process and forming a professional career, a strong family is also a key factor in their meaningful life. Vacations offer complete relaxation and a kind of escape from reality. Analyzing the answers, students are aware that for planning vacation we need resources and time. From their point of view, for accomplishing all these needs, working hard and finding a well-paid job in the near future is the best solution.

The fourth objective explains how students can get closer to their meaning in life.

In table no 3 we present the most relevant key-words that have been chosen by students in order to describe what they do to get closer to a meaningful life.

Table no. 3: The words frequency related to what they do to get closer to the meaning of life

Word	Frequency
Work	5
Skills	3
Family	2
Study	2
Career	1

Source: own computing data

We notice that, to get closer to the meaning in life, students first of all try to understand themselves, to figure out what to do with their future and develop personal skills. The most frequent is *work*. Due to this point, we understood that respondents try to work hard, be more responsible, independent in order to get closer to a meaningful life. Another word with a big frequency is *skills*. Students improve their skills every day, invest in knowledge and in themselves. By building good relationships with everyone they create a positive correlation between thoughts and actions. The third common word is *family*, taking care of their loved ones get them closer to the meaning in life. *Studying* is also an important decision that emphasizes the importance of being educated and follow the rules. Students also opted for following their values, take care of friends, build strong relationships with everyone and have a successful career.

Working day by day to have enough financial resources, improve social and cultural skills by studying hard get students closer to their meaning of life. The key factor is independence and have a precise purpose to follow in order to get the success in life. *The fifth objective* aims to explain how they see their meaning of life evolving five years after graduation.

In table no. 4 we show students expectations for their meaning in life to be in five years.

Table no. 4: The words frequency regarding the meaning in life after five years

Word	Frequency
Family	9
Career	6
Job	5
House	2
Money	2
Travelling	1

Source: own computing data

The biggest frequency has the word: *family*. Building a family leads to respect, support. Another word with big frequency was: *career*, followed closely by *job*. Students want financial independence and are looking to grow in career in order to have big possibilities in life. The respondents' answers made us understood that they can create a positive correlation between career and family. Creating this strong connection and improving it day by day make lifemaking meaningful and happy. As we already saw, students have these strong ideas at a very young age and set milestones in order to achieve the best. Other key words determined in the interview were *house*, *money* and *travelling*. All of this are a sort of consequences of the first three words with the biggest frequency. If you have a big family, well-paid job and a future grow in career, the possibilities to travel, buy a house and have money are unlimited.

5. Conclusions

As we already know, people always try to find solutions and definitions to different aspects of their life. People struggle to understand the meaning of natural disasters, medical diagnoses, life on other planets and they also since centuries try to understand the meaning of their own life. The concept of meaning in life has not a clear definition. Despite its controversy and the fragmented debates in literature, most of people define their life based on something that keeps them awake. There are a lot of studies that identifies the meaning of life, but most of them are based on the presence of meaning in work.

Meaning in this sense enables people to interpret and organize their experience and effectively direct their energies. The concept of meaning in life is something abstract, each of us define their own meaning in life. Each of us set goals and have a specific purpose thereupon to focus. Via this research we wanted to contribute with a small part to the existent literature regarding the meaning of life. We pointed out and focused specifically on the meaning of life for 20 years old students and in the same time make a correlation between their opinions and beliefs.

The strongest and most frequent associations, as we noticed in our research, are made with family, career and happiness. At 20 years old, students understand the meaning in life by having meaningful relationships, building homes and strong careers and

feeling good. Students also define it by values, love, friends, being healthy and having a purpose in life.

They stand for sharing emotions every day and working hard for achieving goals. Money is important. But, more than having money, is important what money can bring. And here we found strong associations between having money and being happy, healthy and travelling all over the world.

Our subjects were senior students, so they were about to graduate. In that context, the present concern was related to having a well-paid job and starting a career. Therefore the immediate meaning in life was to be financial independent. For that reason they tried first to understand themselves, what they want, what they prefer and what they hate. Students figured out what to do in near future and developed personal skills. But, after five years, they expect to move their meaning of life in another direction, especially the one responsible for relations and family. Career and money will still be important, but not as important as having dear and important people beside them.

The biggest limitation of our research was the constraint we had to face due to the pandemic situation. Also, the subject itself is difficult to comprehend and to be explained in words by anyone, at any age, especially by youngsters. The answers given in a face-to-face conversation and without any preparation seemed to be quite impossible sometimes.

In conclusion, the general meaning of life at twenty years old from the students' point of view emphasizes major values like family, friends, love, career, job and money. Due to this fact, students have a lot of common ideas, beliefs and desires. Beginning from the concept of meaning in life, we can say that each person defines its own concept and purpose. Students have powerful ideas at a very young age and set milestones in order to achieve the best. To sum all this up, we can say that literature bring us a lot of possible definitions from different scientists regarding the meaning of life, but the main fact is that these definitions are just hypothesis and possible answers. Each of us think and believe that they are living a unique meaningful life and struggle day by day to make it better.

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