Media self-congruity among the generational cohorts of Boomers and Gen Y in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Our study employed the Generational Cohort Theory as an alternative method to segment and identify consumer profile and its media congruity in an emerging country (i.e. Malaysia). It is more efficient and reliable than other segmentation methods such as demographic variables and cross-sectional. We aim to establish and validate the influential events (e.g. social, political, economic and technological) used by the Boomer and Gen Y generational cohorts. Our study also identified suitable types of media that are congruent with the respective generational cohorts based on the external events. A self-administered survey was used, and the respondents consisted of two generational cohorts (Boomers and Gen Y). A total of 370 useable completed surveys was collected. We validated the external events proposed from the literature and empirically confirmed that these external events influenced both generational cohorts. The study indicates that respondents from both generational cohorts responded to the external events, which occurred during their coming of age (i.e. age 17–23), and this had a significant impact on them. Our empirical findings also suggest that there are additional external events that influence generational cohorts apart from that of the literature. The results show that Gen Y cited highly on most of the influential external events that occurred during their coming of age as compared to Boomers. This study contributes to identifying and establishing the external events of generational cohorts in Malaysia and would be useful in predicting media preferences using generational cohort profiles.

Keywords: *Media self-congruity, digital native, digital immigrant, Gen Y, Boomers*

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, many brands face challenging conditions to remain competitive. There are a number of factors that contribute to the current situation such as globalisation, new digital technologies (e.g. Internet, social networking sites) and the global financial crisis (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2010; Meenaghan, 2013). Inarguably, it is vital for brands to identify and segment their consumers for marketing communication activities (Mulvey, Lever, & Elliot, 2019; Schewe & Noble, 2000). It could be argued that the common "one size fits all" assumption is no longer practical or feasible especially in the current business environment. These challenges have pushed brands to become more cautious, especially in their marketing budget allocations to target potential consumers.

There are several traditional methods used in identifying and segmenting consumers (e.g. demographic variables and cross-sectional). However, previous studies have found that the Generational Cohort Theory (GCT) to be more efficient and reliable in segmenting consumers (Loroz & Helgeson, 2013; Schewe, 2003; Schewe, Noble, & Meredith, 2000). GCT defines individuals who were born in the same period, and have experienced similar external events (e.g. social, political, economic and technological) during their early adulthood as a group (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Mannheim, 1952; Schuman & Scott, 1989).

In this respect, the external events experienced by individuals have an impact on the formation of a cohort. Generational cohort profiles are homogeneous among the same cohort members. However, the profile is distinct from that of other cohorts (Motta, Schewe, & Rossi, 2002; Schewe & Noble, 2000). Each cohort has a unique profile (e.g. characteristics, values, attitudes, and preferences) as its members have experienced different external events. As such, brands are required to identify significant external events experienced by a cohort that would directly affect its profile (Schewe et al., 2000), especially when doing business in different countries (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020).

Previous studies found GCT to be considerably useful in determining and segmenting consumers' profile, especially as it includes their decision-making process (Bravo, Catalán, & Pina, 2019; Fam, Waller, Ong, & Yang, 2008; Funches, Yarber-Allen, & Johnson, 2017; Gardiner, Grace, & King, 2013; Luna-Cortés, 2018). Moreover, GCT has been widely used as a segmentation method in other countries such as United States (US), Russia, China, New Zealand, Brazil, Bangladesh and Mexico (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Meredith, Schewe, Hiam, & Karlovich, 2002; Schewe et al., 2013; Sharma, Newaz, & Fam, 2017). Therefore, identifying generational cohort profiles (e.g. values, attitudes, and characteristics) in a particular country is pivotal in consumer segmentation since each country has a unique and distinct socialisation process (i.e. external events).

Our study focuses on the emerging country context and Malaysia was chosen as a multi-ethnic country with a diverse cultural background and a plural society (Fontaine, Richardson, & Foong, 2002; Jali, 2003). Malaysia has a unique characteristic not only among its cohorts but also between its various ethnic groups. Previous studies have often been based on the US generational cohorts as a benchmark to define generations (Fernández-Durán, 2016); however, each country has unique external events that differentiates it from another (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). This argument is supported by Chang and Taylor (2016) who discovered the differences of generational cohort profiles between emerging and developed countries, despite being in the same age group or cohort.

According to World Bank (2019), Malaysia is considered as one of the most competitive economies in the world and is expected to become a high-income country by 2024. The country continues to demonstrate a tremendous growth in the retail sector, and is capable of providing more opportunities for brands to expand their business here

(Mohd-Ramly & Omar Nor, 2017). A number of previous studies encouraged researchers to focus on emerging countries since they are less saturated as compared to developed countries, while still experiencing the early stages of the globalisation process (Al Hakim, Sengupta, & Cuny, 2020; Mulvey et al., 2019; Paparoidamis, Tran, & Leonidou, 2019). Therefore, such arguments have motivated us to further explore generational cohort, and to validate the external events that characterises the generational cohorts in Malaysia.

Based on the literature, we identified five generational cohorts in Malaysia. However, our study focuses on two generational cohorts (i.e. Gen Y and Boomers) since Gen Y consists of a greater number of members (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2012), while most Boomers are mature consumers and are established in their careers (Gardiner, Grace, et al., 2013). Both generational cohorts, thus, represent current and future consumers.

Based on the above discussion, our main objective is to establish and validate the external events for both generational cohorts: Boomers and Gen Y. It requires the validation and reconfirmation of the external events that have been identified by conducting an empirical study rather than relying solely on literature (Noble & Schewe, 2003). Then, our current study identified the types of media (e.g. new and traditional media) that are congruent with the respective generational cohorts based on the external events. Our study used the Digital Native and Digital Immigration definition by Prensky (2001, 2004) to segment generational cohorts' congruity with media. It may prove useful as an indicator of consumer self-congruity with digital (e.g. Internet, social networking sites) or non-digital media (e.g. printed newspaper, television).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generational Cohort Theory
Generational Cohort Theory (GCT) defines as a group, individuals who were born in the same period, and have experienced the same external events (historical, social) during their coming of age (i.e. late adolescence and early adulthood) (Mannheim, 1952; Schewe & Noble, 2000). Motta et al. (2002) pointed out that individuals who are within the same generational cohort are homogeneous and share a common profile. However, they are different from other generational cohorts. It could be argued that each cohort might have a different profile as compared to other cohorts based on external events that they have encountered during their coming of age period (Schewe & Noble, 2000).

Coming of age is a powerful period that creates an individual's profile and the profile remains unchanged for the entire life (Loroz & Helgeson, 2013; Meredith et al., 2002). Previous studies suggest that the external events experienced by individuals during their coming of age (e.g. age 17–23) affect the formation of their generational cohort profile (Funches et al., 2017; Mannheim, 1952; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schuman & Scott, 1989). Therefore, our study decided to choose the age range of 17 to 23 as the coming-of-age period to identify consumers' defining moments (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Schewe & Meredith, 2004; Schewe et al., 2000).

Unlike the traditional generation segmentation method, a cohort's coming-of-age period is not determined by the length of time (e.g. 20 to 25 years). It can be shorter or longer than that of other cohorts, and it also does not necessarily have a fixed period since it depends on the external events experienced during the cohort's coming of age (Meredith et al., 2002; Schewe et al., 2000).

Segmenting generational cohorts based on external events might be useful in distinguishing one cohort from another (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Funches et al., 2017; Gardiner, King, & Grace, 2013; Schewe & Noble, 2000). Further, a number of scholars

believed that external events have an impact on individual's profile as well (Gardiner, Grace, & King, 2014; Mannheim, 1952; Schuman & Scott, 1989; Sharma et al., 2017). Thus, it is essential for marketers to identify the significant events experienced by consumers during their formative years in order to understand their values, characteristics and preferences (Funches et al., 2017; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schuman & Scott, 1989).

Five Malaysian cohorts

We identified the significant external events that occurred in Malaysia, and these events contributed to the establishment of generational cohort profiles during their coming of age (Schewe & Noble, 2000). As mentioned earlier, we have chosen Malaysia as a multi-ethnic country with a diverse cultural background (Westwood & Everett, 1996), as well as a heterogeneous and plural society (Fontaine et al., 2002). Moreover, Milner (1991) stated that the Malaysian population is diversified by various ethnicities, religions, languages, cultures, and economic interests despite all citizens living in the same country.

Based on the literature review related to Malaysian external events (e.g. history and past events), we identified and classified five distinct generational cohorts in Malaysia. The end of the colonial era is the first generational cohort in Malaysia. This generational cohort's members are individuals who were born between 1924 and 1940, and their current ages are between 80 and 96 years old. Their coming of age period was 1941 to 1957 when they experienced World War II, Japanese occupation, Malaysian emergency, Malayan Union, the first general election, and Malaysia's Independence Day (Hoong, 2003; Jali, 2003; Ryan, 1967). This generational cohort experienced the external events of World War II, the Malaysian emergency and the communist threat, and developed characteristics such as depression, scarcity, safety and security concerns (Hoong, 2003; Ryan, 1967). Besides, a majority of the cohort members had joined the security forces or the movement against colonialism. Therefore, these cohort members are characterised as obedient followers who embraced the concept "command and conquer" (Hoong, 2003; Jali, 2003). This cohort exhibits a stronger sense of independence and nationalist spirit as compared to the other cohorts.

The next generation cohort is the post-independence cohort. The cohort members are those born between 1941 and 1952. Their current age in 2020 is 57 to 78 years old. The coming of age for this cohort occurred from 1958 to 1969, after Malaysia had gained independence from the British in 1957. The post-independence cohort experienced the confrontation between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, the formation of Malaysia (Malaya merging with Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak to become Malaysia), the separation of Singapore from Malaysia, the laissez-faire economic policy and the racial riot in 1969 (Embong, 1996; Jali, 2003; Liu, Lawrence, Ward, & Abraham, 2002; Ryan, 1967). The formation of Malaysia with Singapore triggered mixed feelings among Malaysians, especially the Malays. One of the reasons was Singapore had a large number of Chinese, and this affected the political landscape in Malaysia. Thus, these events contributed to characteristics such as instability and political vulnerability among the cohort's members. In addition, high poverty and unemployment also caused people not to favour the government. In fact, the laissez-faire system employed by the government failed to improve the economy of Malaysia, especially for Malays (Embong, 1996). Thus the Malays continued to be poor and this created a huge economic disparity between the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. Therefore, frustration with the government's economic strategy, poverty and deprivation were the characteristics that influenced the cohort members (Zawawi, 2004). As a result, communalism or racism among the cohort's members engendered the racial riot between the Malays and the Chinese in 1969.

After the racial riot in 1969, the Malaysian government made some changes in order to maintain unity and inter-ethnic relationships in Malaysia. The Boomer generation

refers to individuals who were born from 1953 to 1963 and came of age from 1970 to 1981. The current age for this cohort in 2020 is between 57 and 67 years old. Boomers experienced fewer external events as compared to the previous generational cohorts. During this period, the government had taken initiatives to improve national unity after the racial riot. The establishment of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and National Ideology are external events that influenced this generational cohort (Ahmed, Mahajar, & Alon, 2005; Embong, 1996; Jali, 2003). The government wanted to improve relationships and maintain unity among the ethnic groups as well as reduce the economic gaps, which were the main factors that caused the racial riot in Malaysia. This generational cohort embraced national unity and maintained political stability (Abdullah, 1997). However, the NEP only focused on Malays and created a negative impression from other ethnic groups. The NEP policy was perceived as discriminating, providing unfair treatment to other ethnic groups and ignoring their rights (Ahmed et al., 2005; Lee, 1988).

The Generation X (Gen X) cohort are individuals who were born between 1964 and 1979, and the current age in 2020 is between 41 and 56 years old. Their coming of age began in 1981 and ended in 1997. The launching of the first national car, the privatisation policy, Vision 2020, Look East policy, and "Operasi Lalang" were some external events experienced by Gen X (Jali, 2003; Mauzy & Milne, 1983; Rahman, Moen, & Wel, 2004; Siddiquee, 2002). This cohort experienced rapid economic growth (Mehmet, 1982), and obtained more job opportunities than the previous cohort. Meanwhile, the middle class group increased significantly (e.g. from 11.2% in 1990 to 13% in 1995, and expected to reach 15.3% in 2000), and this generational cohort's members received a higher household income (e.g. from RM505 in 1976 to RM2007 in 1995) as compared to the older generational cohorts (Embong, 1996). On the other hand, the Malaysian government had also taken several approaches to maintain stability in Malaysia such as the Internal Security Act (ISA), the Sedition Act, the Official Secrets Act (OSA) and the Printing Presses and Publications Act (Omar & Pandian, 2006). According to Crouch (1992), Malaysia had applied a "neither democratic nor autocratic" approach in government administration (as cited in Teik, 2002, p. 61). Malaysia is a democratic country; however, there are a number of acts used to prevent full democracy in Malaysia. Thus, the Gen X cohort experienced an autocratic government during their coming of age and were forced to obey or comply with government actions (Funston, 2000).

Generation Y (Gen Y) comprises individuals who were born between 1980 and 1999, with their coming of age starting in 1997 until the present. The advent of the Internet was a significant event that influenced this generation (Meredith et al., 2002). This was the beginning of the information age and Malaysia joined the global fray of mastering the globalisation era and transforming into a borderless society. Gen Y is a generation that embraced the internet and digital technology. This generation practically grew up in the internet era and is also known as a "Digital Native" (Prensky, 2001).

Gen Y experienced the Asian financial crisis from mid-1997 until 1998 (Abidin, 1999) when Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased sharply in 1998 (Tourres, 2003, as cited in Ping & Yean, 2007). Gen Y also witnessed a leadership and internal political crisis during their coming of age. This political crisis occurred between Mahathir Mohamad (i.e. the then Prime Minister) and his Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim (Anwar). The culmination of this crisis was the removal of Anwar as Deputy Prime Minister by Mahathir in 1998 (Ganesan, 2004; Ping & Yean, 2007; Teik, 2002). Anwar was also removed from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the biggest political party in Malaysia (Teik, 2002). "Reform movement" is another defining event that influenced Gen Y. After Anwar's dismissal, people protested against the government and were involved in street

demonstrations (Ping & Yean, 2007). The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) was the largest street demonstration Malaysia had ever seen and significantly changed the Malaysian political landscape. This and subsequent protests eventually affected the ruling government especially in the 2008 General Election which is regarded as a "political tsunami" in Malaysia (Hamayotsu, 2010). Gen Y experienced the political transformation towards a desire for a democratic country (Singh, 2000) and a rejection against an autocratic government. One could argue that this generation is more vocal and will demonstrate their dissatisfaction more overtly than the previous generation (Ahmad, 1999). These characteristics can be traced back to the Internet since this cohort was exposed to media or information freedom as well as external media (Fam et al., 2008).

Further, more Gen Y members attained tertiary education from either university or college compared to previous generational cohorts. For instance, the total number of entrants into tertiary education was about 2.9 million from 2002 until 2010 (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2007, 2009, 2010). In addition, education is one of the important processes of socialisation especially in Malaysia. As Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and plural country, hence, education can be considered as a socialisation process that can improve racial integration and ethnic tolerance. Further, Jali (2003) stated that the increasing number of people who obtain an education is a part of efforts to improve the economy, reduce the rate of poverty and foster unity among ethnic groups. Gen Y is exposed to a multi-ethnic environment and integrated together via education. They also underwent a longer education period from school to higher learning institutions compared to previous generational cohorts.

Generational cohorts and media congruity

Self-image congruence may be defined as the extent to which an individual's perceived or evaluated self-concept is congruent with a brand, product, store, sponsorship, event image or personality (Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008). Self-image congruence is also known as "self-congruity" (Sirgy et al., 2008). We have used media self-congruity throughout the article since it focuses on generational cohorts and their media preferences.

Our study focused on two types of media: new and traditional media. The term new media refers to digital media (e.g. websites, social networking sites), whereas traditional media refers to non-digital media (e.g. newspaper, television and radio). The difference between both types of media is in terms of user interactivity. Liu and Shrum (2002) proposed three elements to define interactivity in media. Firstly, active control (users can control the media by accepting or declining information); secondly, two-way communication (online communication between the media and the users); and finally, synchronicity (the degree of synchronisation between a user's input to a communication and the response they receive from the communication). All the interactivity elements are available only in new or digital media and cannot be found in traditional or non-digital media. Taking the above discussion into consideration, this current study used the given definition to differentiate between new and traditional media.

Prensky (2001) coined the terms "Digital Native" and "Digital Immigrant" to distinguish groups based on their knowledge and capabilities in digital technologies (e.g. Internet, social networking sites). He defined a Digital Native as "a group of people who grow up in the digital world and is fluent with the digital language". Technology influences their profile, especially when it comes to media selection and preferences. On the other hand, a Digital Immigrant belongs to the generation born before digital technology emerged. These people need time to learn and understand digital technology (Prensky, 2001, 2004). Therefore, the basis for determining media congruence among generational cohorts is derived from digital capabilities and knowledge of the digital technology.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling and data collection

As discussed earlier, our study aims to establish the influential external events by validating the external events in Malaysia for the Boomer and Gen Y generational cohorts. In GCT, members of a generational cohort tend to share common profiles (e.g. characteristics, preferences, behaviours) since they experienced similar external events (e.g. historical, political, social, and economic events) during their formative years (i.e. ages 17 to 23) (Funches et al., 2017; Mannheim, 1952; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schewe et al., 2000).

There are a few justifications on why we have specifically chosen both generations. Firstly, Gen Y has a greater number of members in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010, 2012, 2017). Meanwhile, most Boomers are mature consumers and are established in their careers (Gardiner, Grace, et al., 2013). Since the age difference between Boomers and Gen Y is akin to that of one between a parent and a child (Gardiner, Grace, et al., 2013; Parment, 2013), it has motivated this current study to investigate the differences between these generational cohorts.

It seems necessary to validate and reconfirm the influential external events by conducting a main study using empirical evaluation rather than relying on the literature (Noble & Schewe, 2003; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2007) since each generational cohort has experienced different external events during their coming of age (Fernández-Durán, 2016). Moreover, generational cohort study in Malaysia is still inadequate (Ting & De Run, 2012). Hence, there is a need to validate and reconfirm the external events to avoid misinterpreting the generational cohorts.

Our study began with the identification of external events from the literature as discussed earlier. Next, we empirically validated the external events related to those generational cohorts as suggested by scholars (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schewe et al., 2013; Schuman & Scott, 1989) (see Figure 1).

The respondents consisted of alumni, staff and current students of major universities in Malaysia, and their involvement was strictly voluntary. Next, we applied a snowball sampling technique and requested the respondents to distribute the questionnaires to their family members, relatives and friends. This technique has the advantages of allowing the researcher to reach difficult target respondents (e.g. Boomers), and to increase the overall sample size. Additionally, it is more cost-effective and time-efficient when it comes to recruiting respondents (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013).
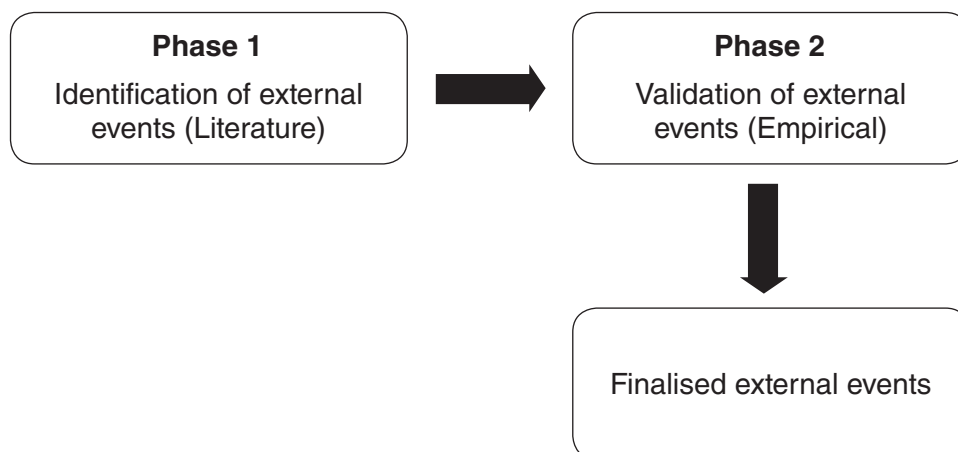

Figure 1. The research model

Questionnaire of the Preliminary Study

The generational cohorts in Malaysia were identified based on the literature review of Malaysian history and past events. Based on our research model (see Figure 1), the respondents of our study were assessed based on the list of external events obtained from the literature for Phase 1.

In Phase 2, we empirically validated the influential external events for the Boomer and Gen Y cohorts. The scale used was adapted from Schuman and Scott (1989) as well as Noble and Schewe (2003). The respondents were required to choose up to 10 external events that were personally important to them (e.g. *Please choose up to TEN (10) of the following historical events that are the most important to you*). Then, they were required to allocate a value from 1 to 10 in order to indicate the importance of the external events *(1 = the most important event; 2 = second-most important;… 10 = the least important event)*. In addition, the respondents were also asked to list additional external events that were not included in the given list but were personally important to them, be it national or international events.

In order to avoid any bias (e.g. did not experience personally), we asked a trap question to ensure only valid respondents participated in the survey (Noble & Schewe, 2003; Sharma et al., 2017). An additional question was asked to verify whether the respondents lived in Malaysia during their coming of age *(Did you live in Malaysia when you were 17 to 23 years old?)*. Hence, only the respondents who had lived in Malaysia during their coming of age were considered for this study.

As a result of this process, the findings on the external events assigned to both generational cohorts should be reliable enough to support or confirm the events identified in the literature review. It might be argued that this current study not only relied on past literature, but also empirically validated and confirmed for both the Boomer and Gen Y cohorts (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Noble & Schewe, 2003).

FINDINGS

A total of 370 useable completed surveys were collected to validate and establish the influential external events for both generational cohorts. The majority of the respondents were Gen Y (n=259) as compared to Boomers (n=111). Our results found that Boomers recalled 11 influential external events (see Appendix 1). From the total of 11 external events, only 4 external events occurred during their coming of age (e.g. 17–23 years old); namely, the establishment of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the formation of the National Ideology, the Japanese Red Army hijacking the AIA building, and the "Memali" incident. In contrast, our results showed that 10 influential external events were frequently cited by Gen Y. Most of the external events occurred during their coming of age except for two (i.e. the first Malaysian Independence Day and Vision 2020).

Interestingly, the racial riot in 1969 was the most cited event for Boomers even though they did not personally experience the event during their coming-of-age period. Boomers might have learned of the event from their family members, friends, education or media instead of experiencing it personally since it was a prominent incident (Schuman & Scott, 1989). In the case of the 1969 racial riot, it did not impact the Boomers' profiles directly since the event occurred outside the coming-of-age period (Meredith et al., 2002; Schewe & Noble, 2000; Schuman & Scott, 1989). Previous studies found that individual's coming of age (e.g. age 17-23) is a crucial period to establish generational cohort profiles (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schuman & Scott, 1989) and these profiles remain unchanged for their entire lives (Motta et al., 2002; Schewe & Noble, 2000). One of

the possible reasons why the 1969 racial riot was the most cited by Boomers, although the event occurred prior to the generational cohort, is probably attributable to its significance as a major event in Malaysian history.

In a similar pattern, Gen Y cited two external events that occurred outside their coming-of-age period. Both external events were significant events that most Malaysians were able to recall even though they did not experience them directly. Boomers and Gen Y cohorts might have learned of these events from their family members, friends, education or media instead of experiencing it personally since they were significant (Schuman & Scott, 1989). As a result, our study did not include the 1969 racial riot for Boomers and two other external events (i.e. the first Malaysian Independence Day and Vision 2020) for Gen Y as external events. As seen in Table 1, our study revised the external events for Boomers and Gen Y according to the study's findings.

Table 1. The finalised list of external events for Boomers and Gen Y

Generational cohort	External events	Profile characteristics
Boomers • Born: 1953 to 1963 • Coming of age: 1970 to 1981 • Current age: between 57 and 67 (2020)	• The establishment of the New Economic Policy (NEP) • Formation of the National Ideology (after 13th May) • Japanese Red Army hijacked AIA building in Kuala Lumpur • "Memali" incident	• Conformity/unity • Stability • economic growth • National unity • Stereotyping • Discrimination • Unfair treatment
Gen Y • Born: 1980 to 1999 • Coming of age: 1997 until recent • Current age : between 21 and 40 (2020)	• Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) demonstrations • "Ops Daulat" in Lahad Datu • The emergence of the Internet in Malaysia • Tsunami in Aceh • 1998 financial crisis • The expulsion of the then Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim	• Democracy/human right • Digital native • Educated • Ethnic tolerance & accepting diversity • Freedom • Information savvy • Knowledgeable society • Transparency & integrity

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to establish and validate the influential external events in Malaysia for Boomers and Gen Y. The results confirmed the findings of prior studies, in particular, both generational cohorts cited the influential external events experienced during their coming of age (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schewe et al., 2013). Our study contributes to the growing corpus of Generational Cohort Theory (GCT) by establishing influential external events, particularly in an emerging country such as Malaysia. This is in response to previous studies urging to extend the theory in emerging countries because of the scarcity of research (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Ting & De Run, 2012). This study sheds some light by identifying and validating influential external events for both generational cohorts, especially in Malaysia.

Our findings also contribute to the formation of generational cohort profiles based on external events. Based on the generational cohort profiles established for Boomers and Gen Y, our study recommends media that are congruent with the generational cohorts based on external events. We relate these generational cohorts' external events and profiles against their media self-congruity according to Prensky's definition (2001). Our study referred Gen Y as the Digital Native generation, whose experience of the emergence of digital technology during their formative years could have possibly influenced their profile (e.g. values, characteristics, and preferences). Gen Y is more competent and more knowledgeable in digital technologies as compared to the Digital Immigrant generation. In contrast to the Digital Native generation, the Digital Immigrant generation needs more time to learn about digital technologies since the technologies were not available during their childhood.

Malaysian Gen Y experienced the emergence of the Internet era (i.e. digital technology) as one of the influential external events during their coming of age. Gen Y also display a stronger preference for digital media such as social networking sites (e.g. Instagram, Facebook) or other electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) platforms compared to other generational cohorts (Hassim, Hasmadi, & Sharipudin, 2020; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020; Sharipudin, Cheung, Oliveira, & Solyom, 2020). They also demonstrate better capabilities to embrace and utilise digital media (Mulvey et al., 2019), and actively engage in sharing on digital media platforms as compared to older generations (Hwang & Kim, 2019). In contrast, the Boomer generation rely more on traditional media than digital media as a medium of information (Harmon, Webster, & Weyenberg, 1999; Keane & Fam, 2005). One of the possible reasons lies in the fact that Boomers make up the digital immigrant generation (Prensky, 2001), and they are more comfortable with non-digital media as compared to Gen Y (Obal & Kunz, 2013). From the GCT perspective, generational cohort profiles are established by the influential external events that occurred during each cohort's coming of age (e.g. age 17-23) which is a crucial period (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schuman & Scott, 1989). However, the emergence of the Internet in Malaysia occurred outside Boomers' coming-of-age period, and did not directly affect their profile. Moreover, Boomers seem to have little trust in the digital media as compared to Gen Y (Obal & Kunz, 2013). Thus, our study suggests that Gen Y which belongs to the Digital Native generation may have a high degree of congruity with digital media as compared to Digital Immigrant generations (e.g. Boomers).

Our findings imply that it is crucial to choose the right communication strategies (e.g. new or traditional media) that have more congruency with the generational cohorts' profile to improve consumers' perceived congruence of a brand (Bridges, Keller, & Sood, 2000) and elicit a positive behaviour (Rodgers, 2007; Suh, Kim, & Suh, 2011). Thus, brands or firms need to choose an appropriate form of media that suits the target consumers in order to promote and communicate their brands or products since each generational cohort has its own media preferences (Bennett, Sagas, & Dees, 2006).

Similar to other research, this study had several limitations. Firstly, this study only examined the Boomer and Gen Y cohorts in Malaysia. For future research, we would suggest to study other generational cohorts especially new generations such as Gen Z, since the new generation might have experienced different influential external events such as Covid-19, the 14th general election as well as political and economy turbulence. Next, our study adapted the scale used by Schuman and Scott (1989) and Noble and Schewe (2003) to establish influential external events in Malaysia. Hence, future research could explore other scales (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Inglehart, 1997; Schwartz, 2008; Schwartz, 2014) in determining and establishing generational cohort extrenal events and profiles. It will

surely benefit future studies to improve on our findings with a more rigorous methodology.

In conclusion, our study employed GCT as the underpinning theory to establish the influential external events for Boomers and Gen Y in an emerging country (i.e. Malaysia). It was proven useful for profiling the media congruity for both generational cohorts. Further, the established external events can be used as a benchmark to identify generational cohorts' preferences and congruity for other studies or disciplines such as education, politics, marketing, tourism and hospitality.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Results for Boomers and Gen Y

Generational cohort	External events	Frequency (%)
Boomers (n=111)		
• Born: 1953 and 1963 • Coming of age: 1970 to 1981 • Current age in 2020: between 57 and 67	• Racial riot in 1969	79.3
	• The establishment of the New Economic Policy (NEP)	72.1
	• Formation of the National Ideology (after 13th May)	67.6
	• Japanese Red Army hijacked AIA building in Kuala Lumpur	55.9
	• "Memali" incident (1985)	53.2
	• Anwar Ibrahim expelled as Deputy Prime Minister	42.3
	• First national car (Proton)	41.4
	• The Independence Day, 1957	37.8
	• Tunku Abdul Rahman resigned as Prime Minister	36
	• Tsunami in Aceh	36
	• Parliament was suspended in 1969 and 1971	33.3
Gen Y (n=259)		
• Born: 1980 and 1999 • Coming of age: 1997 until recent • Current age in 2019: between 21 and 40	• BERSIH demonstration	69.1
	• Ops Daulat in Lahad Datu	69.1
	• The emergence of Internet in Malaysia	59.1
	• Tsunami in Aceh	57.1
	• Financial crisis 1998	56
	• Anwar Ibrahim expelled as Deputy Prime Minister	55.6 54.4
	• The Independence Day, 1957	54.1
	• *1Malaysia concept	53.3
	• 2008 general election	45.2
	• Vision 2020	

*1Malaysia is a concept to inculcate unity among multi-racial Malaysian citizens, based on a number of significant values which should be practiced by all Malaysians

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