

GENERATION Z's PANDEMIC LIFE AND ITS PERSPECTIVES: RETHINKING THEIR PATH TOWARDS A BETTER NORMAL, PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Enormous numbers of generation Z, certainly transformed and abruptly changed their lives because of COVID-19 pandemic that spread globally. During the pandemic Generation Z is embracing the hardship and the struggle they experience build individuals in different ways as in a completely different nature. Home quarantine due to COVID-19 really affects them in many aspects of their lives. The purpose of this study is to determine how COVID-19 impacted Generation Z specifically: the positive and negative impacts on the lives of the students during home quarantine or lockdown; how the Gen Z's changed by the pandemic in terms of physical, mental, and spiritual aspects; problems encountered and lessons learned during pandemic; and how the Local Government Unit and the University contribute to Gen Z's towards a better normal and to the challenges of the future. This study used the mixed method, both quantitative and qualitative approaches with 290 university students. Descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance were utilized in the study. The results show that when COVID-19 pandemic enters our lives, everything changed and realized the following: trust God, take good care for our health, family and our environment as well because it is the one who also take care and protect us, loving and helping each other, be responsible at all times, and giving value to the life that we have each day because Generation Z overcome crisis without giving up to the challenges and become the minds of the future as leaders towards a better normal.

Keywords: *Generation Z, COVID-19 pandemic, home quarantine, better normal*

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z has experienced so much pains, difficulties, and challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic that spread globally. According to Parker and Igielnik of Pew Research Center (2020) Gen Zers are those born after 1996 and as COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the country's social, political and economic landscape, Gen Z now looks to government to solve problems, rather than businesses and individuals and peers into an ambiguous future. Ray Pang, marketing expert and founder of Speaker Agency shares how the world is moving forward and what that means for Generation Z as they begin to college and set foot into the graduation. He further said that "It's all about how we handle adversity and use these challenges to facilitate growth." He also views the financial stability, career resilience, mental health, wellness, and stay open to opportunities are the five things that Gen Zers consider for them to overcome challenges and grow amidst a pandemic.

In the Philippines, the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority indicate the median age of 24.3 years, based on the 2015 census and for Bulacan province, the median is 24.8 years based on the 2010 official census. The demographic profile of Bulacan province is very similar to those of the Philippines. Using the age clustering, the Philippine age demographics by

generation resulted in the following: Generation Z (39.12 %), Gen Y (22.80 %), Gen X (15.90 %) percent, Baby Boomers (10.96%) and silent gen (1.73 %). The largest segments of the current Philippine population are the Generation Z representing 39.12% of the total population. Although Generation Z represent the largest segment of the Philippine population, studies on this age group is very limited, if non- existent. Given the near similarity of the age demographics of the country and Bulacan province, the challenge of undertaking studies and researches on Generation Z is part and addressed by this paper. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the “LIFE” of Gen Z students.

In order to determine the perspectives that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Gen Zers, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the Gen Z college students of the Bulacan State University and their families during lockdown?
2. What are the positive and negative impacts of COVID-19 health crisis on the lives of Gen Z students in the following aspects: Physical, Emotional, Financial and, Spiritual?
3. How have the generation Z been satisfied with the following perspectives of student life during lockdown:
 - 3.1 Turn of events at National and Provincial Government,
 - 3.2 Social distancing,
 - 3.3 Preventive health,
 - 3.4 Local Government support,
 - 3.5 Economic,
 - 3.6 Environment, and
 - 3.7 Satisfaction with life during pandemic?
4. What are the problems encountered and how the identified problems be solved in their own little way and the rest of their family members?
5. What lessons learned from COVID-19 pandemic in times of lockdown as perceived by the Gen Z students?
6. What measures may the Local Government Unit and the University is posited in support to the Gen Z students towards a better normal and to the challenges of the future based on the results of the study?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The respondents of the study comprised University students who were at least 18 years old taking up Bachelor in Public Administration and Bachelor of Science in Education with different fields of specialization. The online questionnaire for quantitative data was initially distributed through social media such as Facebook, messenger, email, and mobile phones. It was patterned from the World Health Organization. Likewise, a set of questions as part of qualitative data was utilized to determine the perception of GenZers on the impact/changes in their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have to narrate their quarantine stories/experiences with the heart. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis were employed to test the relationship between different perspectives and satisfaction with life of GenZ.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that social distancing, environment; preventive health and turn of events at national and provincial government were highly correlated to life satisfaction of generation Z students. Among the various perspectives: social distancing, preventive health, and

environment practices during COVID pandemic significantly affect the life satisfaction of generation Z students.

Positive impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on Gen Z students and family are as follows: I see the value of my life and the value of one another; I have a lot of time for myself, doing some stuff I really want to do like painting, watching movies/series, reading watsapp books; spending more time with my family; taking good care of myself, working out, and staying healthy especially today that there is a virus spreading; the very first positive I see during this pandemic is that it somehow cleans our environment; it allows our mother earth breathe; in which if this pandemic never happens we are not able to realize that our nature is giving too much to us humans; It makes us realize that health really matters than any other; whether you are rich or poor all might have pandemic disease and; it also gave us the chance to make use of internet in more efficient and productive way because most of us are using it for studies and for online selling.

Negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on Gen Z students' life and family felt in education aspect, it has a big impact not just for me but for every student who is not prepared in online education; it affects our daily lives (health, social and economy); it affects my mental health because of the happenings right now, it is too overwhelming; It became hard for us to raise money because we lack of customers; we are always worried of ourselves on how can we make ourselves protected from virus and the dilemma that if we are already asymptomatic how can we distant ourselves to others; this pandemic makes our studying more harder due to online classes and make us harder to understand the lessons; opening our televisions gave us stress because we can't help ourselves from thinking them and how they live; I'm just living with my grandmother during this quarantine that's why I'm the only one who has a big responsibility to do several task like; going to the market, paying bills and many more. That's why I want everything okay because I was so tired of doing those things.

Mental aspect showed positive and negative side. The positive one is I have a lot of time for self-reflection. While negative side is there were a time that I have experienced stress, depression due to over thinking and self-pity due to lack of social interactions. It has a connection with Social aspects that really affects me negatively. On the other hand, the spiritual aspect reflects my pandemic life that was being affected by home quarantine. It really open up my mind, heart and soul to the connection of everyone else which is God. God continuously teaching me and keep on letting me realize that I have a mission in life. I can be His messenger of truth. From every time that I communicate with Him, I always ask Him. What He wants me to do nor what I want to do. I had surrendered everything to him. Therefore, I always depend my life on Him. Through His unexpected things that He have done to me, I can really say everything happens for a reason. We can able to have time to communicate with each other and learned the real value of family relationship together with taking good care for our health.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Gen Zers always encountered problems like misunderstanding due to lack of communication. Problems in paying bills, buying essential goods and many more. I considered myself as one of the way to solve those problems because I am the frontrunner of our family or I should say, I am the one who have a quarantine pass to buy essential goods and pay bills. Well, that was so hard for me to fix those problem but I just keep on being strong so that I can deal with it properly. But

regarding on our family's misunderstanding, I made a way to find the main source of the problem then, try to talk to everyone so that we can solve the problem correctly.

The lessons learned during COVID-19 pandemic as perceived by the respondents were: trusting God, take good care for health, loving and helping each other, cherish every single moment that we have in life, don't give up, don't be selfish, always find ways to smile and laugh, be responsible at all times especially to the decisions that we have chosen, and giving value to the life that we have each day. Pandemic of this global proportion has a disruptive impact on everyone's life. To be safe, it pays that we should know how to avoid being infected. We should always keep ourselves inform on everything that is happening around us. We should always value our health, our family, and the time being spent with them really matter.

I learned the value of voting wisely in the election. In the time of crisis, we need to have a competent and functioning government who will always perform their mandate and set aside their personal advances. Also, we should need to practice empathy and be sensitive to the need of our family and our neighbors. In time like this, we should practice kindness and have a helping hand for others.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND BULACAN STATE UNIVERSITY (BULSU)

Governments, universities, and other organizations introduced various support measures for their constituents, especially for students to overcome the young generations' anxiety, fear, and minimize distress. In preparing the future of BulSU students for study in time/post pandemic higher education system, and shaping the future of Gen Zers, the Bulacan State University administration took initiative to work diligently and innovatively with all partners and stakeholders, the following series of programs/webinars were undertaken: 1) Social stigma and stress management; 2) Embracing a new- normal education amidst pandemic; 3) Tricks on how to embrace; 4) Tricks on how to embrace E-classroom; 4) E-learning Google classroom; 5) Orientation on Flexible learning for parents; 6) HEIs: Forging partnership with Local Government Units ang; 7) Project GEARTues. According to Prof Deane Neubauer move away from "one size fits all" teaching modalities, revise curricula to focus on both the dynamics and effects of the changing environments, re-introduce normative education environments: how should people seek to live in this radically changing world. The BulSU Action Plan for 1st Sem A.Y. 2020-2021 as emphasized by the University President, Dr. Cecilia Navasero Gascon, serves as a guide from the formation of special committee on planning for blended mode education, data gathering for the readiness of BulSU students and faculty in blended mode of education to training of faculty on blended/flexible learning modalities for a better normal learning set-up. We need to equip students with the skills they need to become active, responsible, and engaged citizens. She further explained that the University always believes that collaboration is our lifeline, for us to learn new tools, integrate new teaching modalities, and share responsibility for creating new learning resources for our students.

On the other hand, the role of the Provincial Government of Bulacan, Local Government Units, and other government agencies are as follows: the LGUs are empowered to defeat the virus and fight for COVID-19 pandemic in different ways- house by house, barangay by barangay, city by city, and municipality by municipality; enforce the quarantine measures through barangay mobilization; assist in the training of teachers and students as part of the continuity plan from face to face into flexible/blended learning; the integration of digital technology into everyday

communications to transform interactions, business functions and the use of social media for giving information into smarter governance; and giving financial assistance, deferring student loan payments, implement the stay home policy during pandemic outbreak; providing regular updates and information on websites; and the key from digital governance to good governance-people-centered, new technologies, new government, new governance for improving public service and participation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In early 2020, after a few months, COVID-19 pandemic remarkably transformed the lives of the generation Z students. GenZers were satisfied the way turned of events at National/Provincial Government, social distancing, preventive health, Local Government support, environment, and with the quality of life during pandemic but they were dissatisfied in the aspect of economic practices. The transition from onsite to online mode of delivery of instruction due to COVID-19 health crisis had a stronger effect on the life of generation Z students and various perspectives such as social distancing, preventive health, and environment practices during COVID pandemic significantly affect the life satisfaction of generation Z students. These findings importantly call for the Local Government Units and Universities to closely cooperate, collaborate, and communicate each other with other organizations and stakeholders help rethink the pathways, urgently address the problems, uncertainties, and negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic to the most affected generation which is the GENERATION Z for a “Better Normal”

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