

Identifying Generational Cohorts in Sarawak

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Abstract - The purpose of this paper is to deliberate on efforts to utilize the theories of generations to identify generational cohorts in Sarawak. A qualitative study was carried out via in-depth interview using a purposive sampling method to determine major societal events in the state. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using content analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to assess the frequency of the recalled events and their distribution by age range. Accordingly five generational cohorts were identified, and labeled as neoteric-inheritors, prospective-pursuers, social-strivers, idealistic-strugglers and battling-lifers. The results show that the people in the same cohorts recall the same events that occurred during their formative years and supports past studies that personal attachment to events in the coming-of-age times is a major determinant of a cohort. This validates past findings and lays the groundwork for further analyses on cohort characteristics and use. Recommendations for management are provided.

Keywords - Generational cohort, Sarawak, event, coming-of-age, memory

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of generation and its impact on cohorts of people has long been discussed in various disciplines, including business [1][2][3][4][5]. Specifically, generation study has rapidly gained its relevance in marketing discipline. Studies have shown positive prospects of utilizing generational cohort in marketing strategies and consumer behavior [6][7]. Generation descriptions such as baby boomers, generations X and Y are often associated with marketing opportunities and understanding consumer [8][9], and considered as an basis for marketing practitioners to segment the customers effectively [10].

The notion of generational cohort hinges upon the assumption that individuals are profoundly influenced by cataclysmic events occurring during their coming-of-age years. Schuman and Scott's [11] study demonstrate that similarly aged individuals do share similar memories of the events, and they are recalled predominantly from

adolescence and young adulthood. Moreover, individuals who have personal experiences with the events that they cited are likely to be influenced by the events throughout their lifetime. Holbrook and Schindler [12][13] posit that young adulthood engagement with the societal events is likely to influence individuals well into their adulthood, and therefore it becomes more possible to predict their future behaviors. Given the potential of understanding generational cohorts, this study is purported to be groundwork to utilize the theories of generational cohort in order to come out with the cohorts in Sarawak. Whether different age-groups in the state recall different influential events, and whether they took place during the coming-of-age years are the two questions, hence objectives that this study intends to address and achieve.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Generational Cohort

"Cohort" is defined as (a group of) individuals who are born during the same time period and who experience similar external events, which are described as the "defining moments", during their late adolescent and early adulthood years [6][5][14][15]. This is well supported by definition of "generation" given by Smola and Sutton [16]. Edmunds and Turner's [17] describe generational cohort as individuals who are born at about the same time and experience historical events at about the same point in their human development. In like manner, Gursoy et al. [18] highlight that individuals in the same generation tend to think and act different from those born in other time span. Therefore it goes beyond age to unveil individuals' characteristics in the long term.

Past Theories on Generational Cohort

Mannheim's [2] essay "The Problem of Generations", is one of the earliest works on the subject and regarded as the most systematic and developed treatment of generation from a sociological perspective. It asserted that people are significantly influenced by the socio-historical environment that predominates their youth [19]. Based on his theory of generations, those most influenced by major societal events