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## Examining The Job Engagement of Retail Industry Workers From A Generational Perspective

### Perakende Sektörü Çalışanlarının İşe Adanmışlığının Kuşaklar Perspektifinden İncelenmesi

#### ABSTRACT

The retail industry relies heavily on job engagement as a measure of employee performance and overall organizational success, particularly because of its focus on customer service and sales. This study examines generational differences in job engagement among retail employees, focusing on the physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement. Conducted with a sample of 264 retail employees in Istanbul, the research employs ANOVA analysis to identify differences across generations. Findings indicate a statistically significant difference in physical engagement, with Generation X exhibiting notably higher levels compared to Generations Y and Z. However, no significant differences were observed in emotional and cognitive engagement across generational groups.

These findings emphasize the importance of adopting tailored engagement strategies within the retail sector. The higher physical engagement among Generation X may reflect their stronger emphasis on job stability and traditional work values. In contrast, younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, prioritize work-life balance and meaningful work, suggesting that conventional engagement approaches may require adjustment to align with their values and motivations. The study underscores the necessity of understanding generational preferences to enhance employee motivation and retention effectively, advocating for adaptable strategies that foster engagement across diverse age groups in retail. Ultimately, this research contributes valuable insights into how generational dynamics impact job engagement, offering practical implications for targeted management practices in the industry.

**Keywords:** Generations, Job Engagement, Retail Industry Workers

#### ÖZET

Perakende sektörü, çalışan performansının ve genel örgütsel başarısının temel ölçütlerinden biri olarak işe adanmışlığa önemli ölçüde bağımlı bir yapıdadır. Sektörün müşteri hizmetleri ve satış odaklı yapısı bu gerekliliği daha da belirgin hale getirmektedir. Bu çalışma, İstanbul'da 264 perakende çalışanından oluşan bir örneklem üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiş olup, perakende çalışanları arasında fiziksel, duygusal ve bilişsel adanmışlık boyutlarında kuşaklar arasındaki farklılıkları incelemektedir. Kuşaklar arası farklılıkları belirlemek amacıyla ANOVA analizi uygulanmış ve sonuçlar fiziksel adanmışlıkta istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılıklar ortaya koymuştur; bu bağlamda X kuşağının fiziksel adanmışlık düzeyleri Y ve Z kuşaklarına göre önemli ölçüde daha yüksektir. Buna karşın, duygusal ve bilişsel adanmışlık açısından kuşaklar arasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmamıştır.

Bu bulgular, perakende sektöründe kuşaklara özel adanmışlık stratejilerinin geliştirilmesinin gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır. X kuşağının daha yüksek fiziksel adanmışlığı, iş güvenliği ve geleneksel iş değerlerine olan bağlılıklarını yansıtabilirken, Y kuşağı (Millennials) ve Z kuşağı gibi daha genç kuşaklar iş-yaşam dengesi ile anlamlı bir iş arayışına öncelik vermektedir. Bu durum, geleneksel adanmışlık yaklaşımlarının bu kuşakların değer ve motivasyonlarına uyumlu hale getirilmesini gerektirmektedir. Araştırma, çalışan motivasyonunu ve bağlılığını artırmaya yönelik stratejiler geliştirmek için kuşak farklılıklarını anlamının önemini vurgulamakta ve perakende sektöründe kuşaklar arası farklılıklara uyum sağlayacak esnek stratejileri önermektedir. Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma, kuşak dinamiklerinin işe adanmışlık üzerindeki etkisini aydınlatarak sektördeki yönetim uygulamaları için pratik ve hedeflenmiş çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kuşaklar, İşe Adanmışlık, Perakende Sektörü Çalışanları.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The retail industry relies heavily on job engagement as a measure of employee performance and overall organizational success, particularly because of its focus on customer service and sales. Job engagement is a multifaceted concept encompassing physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, which together reflect how much employees are invested in their roles (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002). High levels of engagement have been linked to beneficial outcomes, such as increased sales, customer satisfaction, and reduced employee turnover (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The fast-paced, customer-driven nature of retail requires employees to maintain high energy levels and commitment to deliver consistent quality service.

However, the retail sector presents specific challenges that can impact job engagement. Irregular work hours, demanding customers, and high turnover rates are common, which can adversely affect engagement levels (Robinson & Barron, 2007). The diverse generational composition of the retail workforce further complicates engagement efforts, as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z bring unique expectations and values to their jobs (Twenge et al., 2010). Understanding these generational differences is essential for crafting strategies that enhance engagement and performance across all age groups in the retail industry.

Research on job engagement within the retail sector highlights the influence of factors such as leadership styles, organizational culture, job design, and work-life balance on engagement levels (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Saks, 2006). Leadership is particularly significant in shaping engagement. Transformational leadership, which involves inspiring and motivating employees, has been found to foster job engagement by instilling a sense of purpose and belonging (Tims et al., 2011; Breevaart et al., 2014). Conversely, poor leadership practices can diminish engagement, leading to disengagement and higher turnover (Schaufeli, 2015). Additionally, organizational support and a positive work environment are critical in sustaining engagement levels, as they help employees manage job demands and feel valued (Rich et al., 2010).

A growing body of research focuses on the impact of generational differences on job engagement and workplace attitudes. Today's workforce includes multiple generational cohorts—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z—each with distinct values, preferences, and motivations shaped by different experiences and cultural backgrounds (Twenge et al., 2010; Costanza et al., 2012). These generational traits can influence how employees perceive work, leadership, and organizational policies, which in turn affects their engagement levels (Nichols & Wright, 2018). For example, Baby Boomers might prioritize job security and a stable career path, while Millennials and Generation Z are more likely to seek meaningful work, flexibility, and opportunities for personal growth (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Recognizing these differences is crucial for developing tailored strategies to foster engagement across all generational groups.

The increasing presence of younger generations in the workforce poses a challenge for traditional retail management practices, as these newer employees may not respond as positively to conventional engagement strategies compared to older generations. Studies suggest that Millennials and Generation Z tend to display lower levels of traditional job engagement, often due to their expectations for work-life balance, rapid career progression, and the integration of technology in the workplace (Akhayan Sarraf et al., 2017; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Retail organizations need to adapt their engagement strategies to accommodate these generational shifts, which may include incorporating flexible work arrangements, offering professional development opportunities, and leveraging digital tools for communication and task management (Twenge & Campbell, 2012).

This study aims to explore how physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement levels differ across generations of retail workers. By examining generational differences, the research seeks to uncover nuanced engagement patterns in a diverse workforce, offering insights that can inform policies and practices to improve employee motivation and retention in the retail sector. The findings will address a gap in the literature concerning the influence of generational dynamics on job engagement in retail settings, providing practical recommendations for organizational leaders to create a more engaged and energized workforce. The following sections will discuss the concepts of job engagement and generational differences in detail, reviewing theoretical foundations and empirical findings. The study's results and implications will be elaborated in the conclusion, with an emphasis on strategies for fostering engagement in the retail industry.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Job Engagement

Engagement is the act of being dedicated to a task or goal and focusing on that goal with determination (Ulukapı, Çelik, & Yılmaz, 2014: 65-66). Job engagement can be defined as employees' willingness to exert effort and focus on their work (Turhan et al., 2012: 180). Kahn (1990: 694) first introduced the concept of job engagement as employees channeling themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally to the organization's interests while performing their duties. According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), job engagement is a positive and satisfying state of mind related to work, while May et al. (2004) define it as the employee's interest and participation in the work. Engaged employees identify with the job itself and are motivated. Therefore, highly engaged employees are expected to be more efficient and play an important role in achieving the organization's goals and objectives (Roberts & Davenport, 2002: 21); they are considered a fundamental competitive advantage (Yılmaz: 2016: 12-13).

In the context of retail, job engagement plays a critical role in determining the quality of customer service and the overall shopping experience. Engaged employees are more likely to exhibit behaviors that go beyond their job descriptions, such as helping customers find products or making personalized recommendations (Rich et al., 2010). These behaviors contribute directly to customer loyalty and increased sales. However, retail employees face specific challenges that can affect their engagement, including long working hours, seasonal work patterns, and physical demands associated with standing or moving for extended periods (Kumar & Kumar, 2012).

Although previous literature on job engagement emphasizes normative pressures toward organizational interests (Erdoğan et al., 2006), there are psychological, emotional, and cognitive aspects of internalizing these efforts in the direction of organizational interests and achieving voluntary employee participation (Khan, 1990). In other words, employees physically, cognitively, and emotionally engage in their duties and work (Özkalp & Meydan, 2015), and job engagement can be examined under three dimensions: physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

**Physical engagement:** This dimension of job engagement refers to employees dedicating themselves physically to their work. Employees who are physically committed perform better. From this perspective, employees who are physically engaged are in demand by firms. Physical engagement essentially means working hard; employees who work hard also reduce the burden on their colleagues (Rich et al., 2010).

**Emotional engagement:** It refers to the employee's transfer of emotions to the roles and duties they undertake in their work. If an employee feels emotionally close to their task while performing it, then their emotional commitment is high (Kurtpinar, 2011: 3-14).

**Cognitive engagement:** It refers to the employee's awareness of the work they are doing. Employees who have high cognitive commitment are constantly engaged in their work (Rich et al., 2010).

### 2.2. Generations

The concept of generation refers to groups of people who have experienced similar conditions, have shared values and beliefs, and consist of approximately 25-30 years of age groups. This statement explains that the term "kuşak" (generation) is used to refer to periods of time between generations, and that it helps to define groups of people who share certain characteristics and tendencies (Lotfi et al., 2013, s. 94). Birth year is a criterion used to determine which generation someone belongs to, and individuals within the same generation may exhibit similar behaviors and characteristics. Therefore, generations are an important concept for understanding and interacting with different groups of people (Pendergast, 2007).

When examining the organizational behavior literature (Leask, 2013; Lub et al., 2012), four main generations, that are actively engaging in today's workforce, are identified. These are the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1960 (after World War II), the Generation X born between 1961 and 1981, the Generation Y born between 1982 and 2000, and the Generation Z born after 2001 (Akhayan Sarraf et al., 2017). The Baby Boomers have been characterized as an "idealistic" and "determined" generation who have witnessed significant technological changes throughout their lives. On the other hand, Generation X has been described as a "nomadic" and "cynical" generation. Generation Y is proficient in learning and technology (Chen and Chou, 2019), while Generation Z is pragmatic and utilitarian (Seymen, 2017).

Generational differences significantly influence work attitudes and behaviors in retail. For example, Baby Boomers may prioritize job security and long-term career development, while Millennials and Generation Z employees often seek flexible schedules and meaningful work experiences (Costanza et al., 2012). These differences can affect how employees from various generations engage with their work in retail settings, where frontline service, rapid customer interactions, and product knowledge are essential (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Understanding these generational preferences is crucial for retail managers who aim to tailor engagement strategies effectively.

Employees from different generations have varying sets of values and beliefs that affect their work approaches, such as job engagement (Twenge et al., 2010; Akhayan Sarraf et al., 2017). Accordingly;

H0: There is no difference in job engagement a) physical engagement, b) emotional engagement, and c) cognitive engagement among the generation groups.

H1: There is a significant difference in job engagement a) physical engagement, b) emotional engagement, and c) cognitive engagement among the generation groups.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Sample and Data Collection Process**

In this study, designed as a descriptive survey model, the aim is to determine whether there are differences in a) physical engagement, b) emotional engagement, and c) cognitive engagement levels of retail workers among generations. For testing this proposition, three private hospitals in Istanbul were selected due to their accessibility. A total of 450 employees were sent an online survey in these three big retail chains, and 264 employees responded. SPSS 13.0 software was used for data analysis, including frequency, validity, reliability analyses, and difference tests. Of the sample of retail sector employees, 26% were male and 74% were female. 44% were high school graduates, 49% were college graduates, and 7% had graduate degrees. 43% of the participants have been working in their current institution for a period of 1-5 years, while 37% have a total of 1-5 years of seniority. Furthermore, 63% of the participants were retail workers, while the rest were administrative staff. Finally, 16% (n=41) of the participants in the sample belonged to the X generation, 57% (n=151) belonged to the Y generation, and 27% (n=72) belonged to the Z generation. Interestingly, perhaps due to the online nature of the survey, there were no baby boomers included in our sample.

#### **3.2. Measures**

In order to measure the job engagement a) physical engagement, b) emotional engagement, and c) cognitive engagement of the healthcare employees, we adopted a scale with 18 items – 6 items for each dimension- from Rich et al.'s (2010) study. To measure generations we directly asked the age and then transformed this age to the generation.

#### **3.3. Validity and Reliability**

Although the validity and reliability of the job engagement scale have been tested in previous studies, we subjected the data to validity and reliability analysis again. After dropping one item from emotional engagement, Cronbach's alpha values were calculated as .92 for physical engagement, 0.89 for emotional engagement, and .91 for cognitive engagement. Exploratory Factor Analysis shows that job engagement is divided into three factors as expected (KMO: .830; Explained Total Variance: 67.020).

### **4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The research problem has been analyzed by examining the distributions of physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement variables across generations using ANOVA test (see Table 1). The findings show that there is a statistically significant difference only for physical engagement between generations, where the physical dedication of Generation X is significantly higher than that of Generation Y and Z. However, no significant difference is found for emotional and cognitive engagement across generations.

**Table 1.** ANOVA Results

Variables		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Gen.	Mean	F	Sig.
<b>Physical Engagement</b>	Between groups	2.687	2		x	<b>3.837</b>	<b>3.063</b>	<b>.028</b>
	Within groups	85.383	292	.896	y	3.288		
	Total	88.069	295	.292	z	3.365		
<b>Emotional Engagement</b>	Between groups	2.071	2		x	3.713	1.829	.142
	Within groups	110.196	292	.690	y	3.725		
	Total	112.266	295	.377	z	3.701		
<b>Cognitive Engagement</b>	Between groups	.388	2		x	3.448	.458	.712
	Within groups	82.377	292	.129	y	3.583		
	Total	82.765	295	.282	z	3.562		
<b>Engagement Total</b>	Between groups	.263	2		x	3.533	.453	.715
	Within groups	54.329	292	.084	y	3.600		
	Total	54.583	295	.186	z	2.624		

## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the differences in job engagement levels across generational cohorts, with a particular emphasis on physical engagement. Consistent with existing literature (e.g., Akhavan Sarraf et al., 2017), Generation X exhibits significantly higher levels of physical engagement than both Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z. This heightened engagement among Generation X may stem from their work-related values, where they perceive work as not only a necessity but also a meaningful part of life, integrating professional and personal fulfillment. These results suggest that strategies to enhance engagement, especially among younger generations, should account for the distinct motivational drivers and work values of each generation. For instance, promoting a sense of purpose and integrating flexible work arrangements may better support engagement among Millennials and Generation Z, who prioritize work-life balance and meaningful experiences.

The study contributes to a deeper understanding of generational differences in job engagement, emphasizing the necessity for customized management practices that address the diverse needs of a multi-generational workforce. In the retail sector and beyond, the findings have implications for human resource policies and employee development programs. Recognizing the distinct traits of each generational group allows organizations to implement targeted interventions that foster engagement, reduce turnover, and improve overall organizational performance (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2012). These tailored approaches can better align organizational practices with the values and expectations of different age groups, thereby enhancing workforce cohesion and productivity.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. The analysis focused exclusively on three dimensions of job engagement—physical, emotional, and cognitive—without considering other potentially influential factors such as social support, job resources, or leadership styles, which may also impact engagement across generations (Saks, 2006; Rich et al., 2010). Future research could build upon these findings by including additional variables like organizational climate, career development opportunities, or work autonomy to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing engagement across different age groups. Moreover, the study's cross-sectional design limits its ability to establish causality, suggesting that longitudinal studies could offer valuable insights into how engagement evolves over time and throughout different career stages.

Additionally, the generalizability of the study's findings may be limited by its specific focus on retail employees. Although the retail sector has distinct challenges and stressors that can affect engagement, other industries may display different engagement patterns due to varying job demands and work environments. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying these findings to other contexts, and future studies should aim to replicate the research in various occupational settings, such as education, technology, or manufacturing, to determine whether similar generational trends in engagement are evident (Shanafelt et al., 2012; Costanza et al., 2012).

In summary, this study not only highlights generational differences in physical engagement within the retail workforce but also underscores the importance of understanding these variations for effective organizational management. The results advocate for a nuanced approach to employee engagement strategies, one that is attuned to the evolving values and expectations of today's workforce. By aligning management practices with the specific needs of different generational cohorts, organizations can cultivate a more motivated, resilient, and engaged workforce, ultimately driving better organizational outcomes.



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