Toward a Thai-Specific Generational Cohort Framework: A Basic Individual Values Perspective

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Abstract

This study takes a step toward developing a Thai-specific generational cohort framework grounded in the country's historical, economic, and social transformations. Drawing on Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values, the study examines how shared formative experiences are reflected in relative value prioritization across generational cohorts. Using secondary survey data from Thailand, the study employs a comparative cohort-based analysis to contrast the proposed Thai generational classification with the U.S.-based generational framework commonly used in prior research. The results indicate that the Thai classification offers a more nuanced and culturally grounded segmentation, capturing generational differences that are less apparent when Western cohort definitions are applied. In particular, younger Thai cohorts place greater relative emphasis on Face and Conformity, while patterns in Achievement, Security, and Universalism diverge from those observed under U.S.-based cohort classifications. These findings contribute to the literature on generational analysis by demonstrating the value of context-specific cohort frameworks and highlighting the importance of incorporating national historical and socio-economic conditions when studying generational value differences. The results have implications for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who rely on generational classifications in the Thai context.

Keywords

Basic individual values; cohort analysis; generational classification; Schwartz's theory; Thailand

Introduction

Understanding generational cohorts is essential for analyzing differences in values, attitudes, and behaviors across age groups. The concept has been widely applied across fields such as marketing, human resource management, public policy, and sociology to explain how different age groups respond to economic conditions, technological advancements, and social changes (Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schewe & Meredith, 2004). Businesses leverage generational segmentation to understand consumer preferences and consumption patterns (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989; Mannheim, 1952; Strauss & Howe, 1991), while organizations apply it to explain leadership style (Yu & Miller, 2005), workforce expectations and career aspirations (Gurău, 2012; Ivanova et al., 2019; Slootweg & Rowson, 2018; Williams & Page, 2011). Additionally, policymakers and social researchers utilize generational insights to design effective policies and social interventions tailored to different age groups (Fisher, 2024; Grasso et al., 2019).

Most generational classifications are Western-centric, particularly those derived from U.S. studies. Common generational labels—such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z—were developed based on historical events that shaped American society. However, despite their limited applicability to Thailand's unique historical and socio-economic landscape, many Thai researchers and businesses continue to adopt these classifications (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Hung Kee et al., 2019; Park & Park, 2024).

Key Thai historical milestones—including the political movements of the 1970s, the economic boom of the 1980s, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the digital revolution of the 2000s, and recent political and social shifts—have significantly shaped Thai attitudes toward education, careers, financial habits, and social activism (Soo Hoon & Lim, 2001; Srisathan & Naruetharadhol, 2022; Ungpakorn, 2006). However, the absence of a Thailand-specific generational framework raises concerns about misinterpretation of consumer behavior, workforce dynamics, and social trends. This highlights the need for a classification model that accurately reflects Thailand's distinct historical, economic, and cultural context.

To address this gap, this study examines how major historical and economic events have shaped Thailand's generational cohorts and proposes a Thailand-specific framework. By applying Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values (Schwartz & Cieciuch, 2022), this research compares the proposed classification with the existing U.S. classification to assess their relevance and explanatory power. The Thailand-specific generational framework will enhance demographic segmentation within Thai society. Our findings provide valuable insights for businesses refining their marketing approaches, organizations managing multigenerational workforces, and policymakers designing targeted policies. Furthermore, this research challenges the assumption that generational classifications are universally applicable, emphasizing the need to contextualize generational studies within country-specific historical, economic, and technological realities.

Literature review

Generation Cohort Theory

Generational cohort theory, first formalized by Mannheim (1952), proposes that individuals who experience similar historical, economic, social, and cultural events during their formative years develop shared values, attitudes, and behaviors that distinguish them from other age groups (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989; Strauss & Howe, 1991). The formative years, typically defined as ages 17 to 23, are when such defining events—sometimes called "coming-of-age events"—have the most lasting impact (Fernández-Durán, 2016; Schuman & Scott, 1989). These experiences contribute to a sense of cohesiveness within cohorts, shaping beliefs, lifestyles, and behavioral patterns that remain relatively stable throughout adulthood (Inglehart, 1997; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Ting et al., 2018).

A generational cohort is thus more than just an age group; it reflects the influence of "defining moments" in social, political, economic, and technological domains (Williams et al., 2010). For example, American Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) came of age during a period of economic prosperity and social transformation, fostering strong career-oriented and individualistic values. In contrast, Chinese Millennials grew up during rapid urbanization and globalization, leading to more materialistic, digitally driven consumption patterns (Hung et al., 2007). External events such as wars, economic crises, and technological advancements also play a crucial role in differentiating the values and behaviors of generational cohorts (Duh & Struwig, 2015; Schewe & Noble, 2000).

Schewe and Meredith (2004) identified several prerequisites for the formation of generational cohorts: (1) Coming-of-age events experienced during formative years; (2) Mass communication, ensuring that events are widely known; (3) Literacy, enabling individuals to understand the implications of these events; and (4) Social consequences, meaning the events have a significant impact on society and personal lives. These conditions help explain why generational cohort structures can vary significantly across different countries and cultures.

Most generational research has relied on U.S.-centric models, categorizing cohorts as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z (Eastman & Liu, 2012; Munsch, 2021; Strauss & Howe, 1991). However, this approach has been criticized for failing to account for cultural and historical differences between countries. Recent studies emphasize the importance of context-specific cohort definitions shaped by unique national histories and formative experiences (Grasso et al., 2019; Park & Park, 2024; Ting et al., 2018). For instance, Malaysia has its own generational cohorts, such as Inheritors, Pursuers, and Reformers, reflecting locally relevant historical and societal influences (Ting et al., 2018).

Generational cohort analysis has been widely applied to track shifts in consumer behavior, workplace dynamics, and societal change (Schewe & Meredith, 2004). Even though younger generations are exhibiting signs of convergence across national boundaries due to increased global communication (Meredith et al., 2002), cultural and historical distinctions remain essential. In the Southeast Asian context, and particularly in Thailand, research suggests that relying solely on Western generational labels may overlook locally meaningful formative experiences (Ting et al., 2018). Political movements, economic transformations, and the pace of digitalization have uniquely shaped Thai generations, underscoring the need for context-specific cohort classifications. Understanding the local historical milestones that shape generational values is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking relevant segmentation frameworks and effective strategies for Thai society.

Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values

Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how human values guide individual and societal behaviors across generations and cultures. According to Schwartz (1992, p. 4), values are "guiding principles in life" that: (1) are concepts or beliefs, (2) refer to desirable end states or behaviors, (3) transcend specific situations, (4) guide the selection or evaluation of behavior and events, and (5) are ordered by relative importance (see also Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, 1990). These characteristics make values enduring predictors of attitudes, motivations, and actions.

The theory initially proposed seven and later eight value types (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, 1990), before being refined into ten core values in Schwartz's (1992) foundational model. These ten values are arranged in a circumplex structure, where proximity reflects motivational compatibility and distance signals conflict. They are grouped into four higher-order dimensions (Schwartz, 1992): (1) *Openness to change* (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism) emphasizes independence, novelty, and personal exploration; (2) *Conservation* (security, conformity, tradition) reflects stability, social order, and respect for norms; (3) *Self-enhancement* (achievement, power, hedonism) relates to personal success, authority, and dominance; and (4) *Self-transcendence* (universalism, benevolence) focuses on the well-being of others and the natural world.

In this model, opposing dimensions represent conflicting motivational goals—for instance, openness to change contrasts with conservation (autonomy vs. tradition), while self-transcendence opposes self-enhancement (altruism vs. self-interest). The values are not equally spaced around the circle, forming a quasi-circular structure that highlights nuanced relationships; for example, self-direction is adjacent to stimulation (reflecting shared motivational goals) but opposite conformity, underscoring value conflict (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005). Hedonism uniquely bridges openness to change and self-enhancement (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). These values are considered universal because they address three fundamental requirements of human existence: biological needs, social interaction, and group survival (Schwartz et al., 2012). Over the past three decades, this model has been widely validated across cultures and applied in hundreds of studies examining the relationships among values, behaviors, attitudes, personality traits, and demographic factors.

To enhance granularity, Schwartz et al. (2012) expanded the model into 19 more specific value types, offering a refined version of the theory that enables researchers to detect subtle motivational differences across individuals and cultural contexts (Schwartz & Cieciuch, 2022). These 19 values are: (1) *Self-Direction–Action*: freedom to determine one's own behavior; (2) *Self-Direction–Thought*: freedom to form and express one's own ideas; (3) *Stimulation*: pursuit of excitement, novelty, and change; (4) *Hedonism*: seeking pleasure and sensuous gratification; (5) *Achievement*: demonstrating competence and achieving success; (6) *Power–Resources*: gaining control over material and social resources; (7) *Power–Dominance*: exercising influence over people; (8) *Security–Societal*: ensuring societal safety and order; (9) *Security–Personal*: securing one's immediate environment; (10) *Conformity–Interpersonal*: avoiding actions that upset or harm others (11) *Conformity–Rules*: compliance with societal rules and obligations; (12) *Face*: maintaining a favorable public image and avoiding shame; (13) *Tradition*: respecting and adhering to cultural or religious customs; (14) *Humility*: recognizing one's insignificance and accepting limits; and (15) *Benevolence–Dependability*: being a responsible and reliable group member; (16) *Benevolence–Caring*: concern for the well-being of close others; (17) *Universalism–Tolerance*: acceptance of people who are different; (18) *Universalism–Concern*:

commitment to justice and equality for all; (19) *Universalism–Nature*: protection of the environment and nature.

Generational cohorts—shaped by distinct historical, political, and technological contexts—tend to develop shared value priorities. Prior research has applied Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values to examine intergenerational value differences across societies (e.g., Egri & Ralston, 2004; Hung et al., 2007; Sortheix et al., 2019). Building on this literature and recognizing that formative life experiences shape values, this study applies Schwartz's 19-value model to examine generational value differences between the proposed Thai generational classification and the U.S. classification. By doing so, this study aims to capture culturally specific and historically grounded shifts in value orientations, offering a more nuanced understanding of Thai generational identity.

Schwartz's framework is particularly suitable for generational analysis in the Thai context for two key reasons. First, it emphasizes the relative ordering of values rather than absolute value levels, which aligns with this study's focus on value prioritization across cohorts. Generational differences are more likely to manifest in value hierarchies than in uniform value endorsement. Second, the framework's extensive cross-cultural validation enables meaningful international comparisons while remaining sensitive to culturally embedded value expressions.

Moreover, the relevance of Schwartz's framework is reinforced by Thai socio-cultural scholarship. Komin (1990) conceptualized Thai cultural values as hierarchical and relational systems, in which values such as face, interpersonal harmony, and security are central and context-dependent. This perspective aligns closely with Schwartz's emphasis on structured value priorities and provides a culturally grounded foundation for examining how such values may be differentially prioritized across Thai generations.

Compared with cultural value frameworks that emphasize national-level averages or relatively static cultural dimensions (e.g., Hofstede et al., 2010), Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values offers a more flexible, individual-level structure that is particularly well suited for examining within-society generational variation. This distinction is crucial in the Thai context, where enduring cultural norms coexist with rapid socio-economic transformation across generations. In this study, Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values serves as the primary analytical framework guiding the selection of value dimensions, the interpretation of relative value prioritization across cohorts, and the comparison between Thai and U.S. generational classifications. Rather than treating generations as fixed or homogeneous groups, the framework links shared formative experiences to systematic differences in generational value hierarchies within a Thai socio-cultural context.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method approach grounded in generational cohort theory, which posits that individuals who experience major historical and societal events during their formative years (typically between ages 17–23) develop shared value orientations that distinguish them from other cohorts (Inglehart, 1997; Mannheim, 1952; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Furthermore, generational cohorts in this study are theoretically and historically defined, rather than inductively derived from quantitative data.

This research design follows Schewe and Meredith's (2004) four widely accepted generational cohort-defining criteria: (1) the presence of impactful events during impressionable years, (2) widespread public and media acknowledgment of those events, (3) cognitive readiness and literacy to absorb their meaning, and (4) long-term consequences on values and behaviors. Accordingly, the research was conducted in two complementary phases. A qualitative historical review to identify cohort-defining experiences, followed by a quantitative analysis examining differences in value prioritization across these predefined cohorts.

Guided by Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values, the quantitative analysis focuses on relative value hierarchies, enabling the assessment of how shared formative experiences are associated with systematic generational differences, rather than using statistical techniques to inductively identify cohort boundaries.

Qualitative phase

The qualitative phase consisted of a structured historical review aimed at identifying nationally salient events shaping generational formative experiences. This phase followed a documentary-historical analysis approach, combining a systematic review of secondary sources with expert validation, rather than inductive thematic coding or data-driven cohort identification. The qualitative components served to contextualize cohort boundaries and did not involve inductive theme generation. Secondary sources, including academic literature, government reports, news archives, and historical records, were systematically reviewed to map major political, economic, technological, and cultural events relevant to Thailand's modern history.

To complement the documentary review, expert consultation was conducted with five individuals possessing relevant academic and practical expertise in Thai society, history, and socio-economic development. The purpose of this consultation was to validate the salience, public recognition, and formative impact of the identified events, rather than to generate new analytical categories. This process ensured alignment with established criteria for cohort-defining experiences.

This phase was informed by Schuman and Scott's (1989) concept of collective memory, which emphasizes the role of shared, publicly acknowledged experiences in shaping generational identity. Together, the historical review and expert validation addressed the first two criteria for cohort construction.

Quantitative phase

The quantitative phase utilized a subset of 3,433 respondents drawn from a national consumer survey of 12,000 Thai participants conducted by the Marketing Department, Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy, Chulalongkorn University. The analysis focused on respondents from the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, a population often regarded as early adopters of cultural and technological trends due to greater access to education, mass media, and innovation. This focus supports the criterion of cognitive readiness for interpreting social change.

The dataset was selected because it contains the full set of personal value items required for generational comparison and provides sufficient age coverage across cohorts. Quota-based

sampling ensured balanced representation by gender and across five age groups (18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, and 60–69). Personal values were measured using 57 items adapted from Schwartz and Cieciuch (2022), rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The quantitative phase was designed to examine differences in relative value prioritization across predefined generational cohorts, thereby addressing the criterion of enduring psychological imprint associated with cohort-defining formative experiences. This research received approval from the Research Ethics Committees of Chulalongkorn University (COA No. 176/65).

Results

Qualitative analysis: Thai historical event analysis

This qualitative analysis aimed to contextualize the generational classification by drawing on secondary data, including historical timelines and macroeconomic indicators. Synthesized in Figure 1 and Table 1, the data illustrate how major political, economic, and technological events have influenced Thailand's GDP growth from 1961 to 2023. Periods of rapid growth, such as the late 1960s and 1980s, coincide with industrialization and foreign investment. At the same time, sharp declines coincide with political unrest (e.g., 1973, 1992), financial crises (1997, 2008), natural disasters (2004 tsunami, 2011 flood), and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020). Since the 2000s, economic volatility has been shaped by ongoing political instability and rapid digital transformation.

Figure 1: GDP Growth and Key Historical Events in Thailand

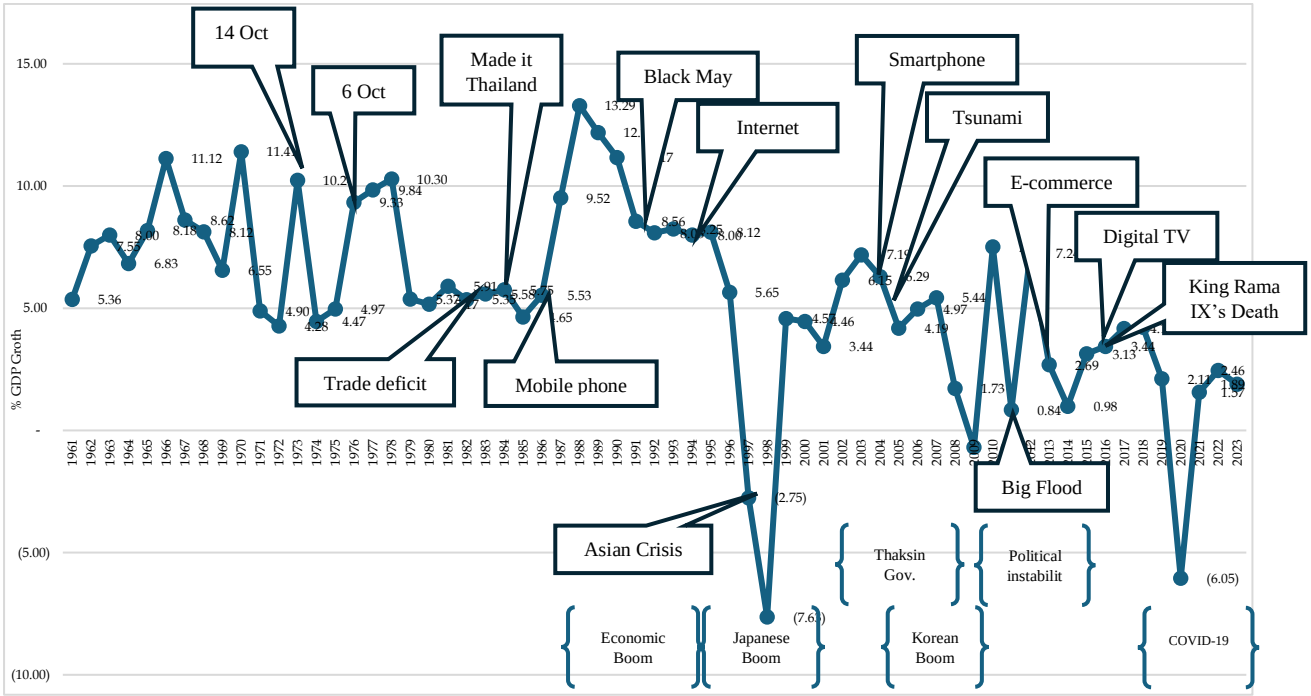


Table 1: Key Historical Events in Thailand

Event	Description
14 October 1973	A major political uprising in Thailand where students and civilians protested against the military dictatorship, leading to political instability.
6 October 1976	A violent crackdown on student protesters at Thammasat University marked a significant political crisis.
Made in Thailand Campaign (1980s)	A government initiative promoting domestic production and consumption to boost the economy.
Trade Deficit (1980s)	A period when Thailand's imports exceeded exports, impacting economic stability.
Mobile Phone Launch (1980s–1990s)	The introduction of mobile phones in Thailand has contributed to modernization and economic growth.
Economic Growth Period (Late 1980s–1990s)	A phase of rapid GDP expansion driven by industrialization and foreign investment.
Black May (1992)	Political unrest following the military-backed government has led to a crackdown on protests and economic uncertainty.
Internet (Mid-1990s)	The introduction of the internet in Thailand has facilitated digital transformation.
Asian Financial Crisis (1997–1998)	A severe economic downturn was triggered by currency devaluation and financial instability in Thailand and neighboring countries.
Japanese Soft Power Boom (Late 1990s)	A period of economic influence from Japanese soft power, such as food and entertainments, likely linked to investments and trade.
Korean Boom (Early 2000s)	A phase of increased economic engagement and investment from South Korea in Thailand.
Tsunami (2004)	The devastating Indian Ocean tsunami caused economic and humanitarian losses, particularly in Thailand's tourism sector.
Smartphone (2000s)	The proliferation of smartphones is transforming communication and commerce.
Thaksin Government (2000s)	Economic reforms and later political instability marked the tenure of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.
Big Flood (2011)	One of Thailand's worst floods caused widespread damage to infrastructure, agriculture, and industry.
Political Instability (2010s)	Repeated political conflicts and protests are impacting economic growth.
Digital TV (2010s)	The transition from analog to digital television is reshaping the media industry.
E-commerce (2010–Present)	The rise of online shopping and digital businesses is contributing to economic shifts.
King Rama IX's Death (2016)	The passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej was a nationally shared and emotionally significant event that marked the end of a long period of political and symbolic stability and influenced collective sentiment and social reflection across generations.
COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–Present)	The global pandemic severely disrupted Thailand's economy, particularly in the tourism and services sectors.

Based on the observed patterns, this study proposes a classification of Thailand's modern history into six distinct socio-economic and political eras from 1970 to 2022, as outlined in Table 2. These eras are designed to reflect recurring cycles of stability, transformation, crisis, and recovery, offering a contextual framework for analyzing the formative environments that influenced the socialization of different generational cohorts. The six proposed eras are described as follows:

Table 2: Proposed Six Eras of Thai Modern History

Years	Proposed Era	Key Events & Rationale
1971–1980	Early Political Awakening & Globalization	• The 14 October 1973 uprising and 6 October 1976 massacre reflect intense political socialization. • The shift toward early economic openness and trade deficits in the late 70s marks early globalization impacts.
1981–1989	Industrial Expansion & National Identity	• "Made in Thailand" campaign represents economic nationalism and domestic industrial policy. • Economic growth and the introduction of mobile phones signaled modernization and rising optimism.
1990–1999	Digital Turn & Economic Crisis	• The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis profoundly shaped risk perceptions and economic outlook. • Simultaneous spread of the internet marks a shift to digital awareness and global connectedness.
2000–2008	Recovery, Innovation & Digital Life	• Rapid economic recovery under Thaksin's government. • Smartphone penetration and early e-commerce adoption signal lifestyle transformation and mobile-driven behavior.
2009–2015	Political Unrest & Environmental Crisis	• Period of political instability, public protests, and the 2011 Big Flood significantly disrupted life and trust in public systems. • Digital TV reform also changed media consumption patterns.
2016–2022	Pandemic Shock & Economic Stagnation	• The passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 2016 marked a nationally shared symbolic transition and period of collective reflection, shaping the broader socio-emotional context of this era. • COVID-19 reshaped norms in education, work, and health. • Flattened GDP growth, tourism collapse, and social distancing led to value reevaluation, possibly increasing Conservation and Self-Transcendence.

1971–1980: Early political awakening and global integration

This era was characterized by intense political turbulence, including the 14 October 1973 uprising and the 6 October 1976 massacre—both pivotal moments in Thailand's political development. These events signaled a weakening of authoritarian rule and a rise in civic mobilization and student activism. Concurrently, early signs of global economic integration emerged, reflected in recurring trade deficits and the adoption of more liberal economic policies.

1981–1989: Industrial expansion and economic nationalism

The 1980s witnessed sustained economic growth driven by industrial development and increased domestic production. The government's "Made in Thailand" campaign promoted economic nationalism and self-reliance. The introduction of mobile phones and the rise of urbanization supported the emergence of a modern consumer class, aligning with broader patterns of modernization and middle-class expansion.

1990–1999: Economic volatility and digital emergence

A dual narrative of progress and disruption marked this decade. While the advent of the internet signaled Thailand's entry into the digital era, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis caused a severe economic contraction, exposing systemic vulnerabilities. This period was marked by heightened uncertainty, but also by the beginnings of digital transformation.

2000–2008: Recovery, digital consumption, and political realignment

Thailand experienced a post-crisis economic rebound during this era, underpinned by global market reintegration and rapid technological innovation. The widespread adoption of smartphones and the early growth of e-commerce redefined consumer behavior. Meanwhile, Thaksin Shinawatra's administration introduced populist policies and significantly reshaped the political landscape, contributing to increasing polarization.

2009–2015: Political instability and environmental disruption

This period was marked by persistent political unrest and institutional instability, with frequent protests and power shifts. A major environmental crisis, the 2011 Big Flood, disrupted national infrastructure and economic activity. Despite these challenges, the digital ecosystem continued to advance through the introduction of digital television and the expansion of online platforms.

2016–2022: Pandemic shock and economic stagnation

The period began with a major symbolic transition marked by the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 2016, a nationally shared and emotionally significant event. Subsequently, the COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented societal and economic disruption. Lockdowns, travel restrictions, and supply chain breakdowns caused a substantial contraction in GDP, particularly in sectors such as tourism and services. In response, Thai society rapidly adopted digital tools for work, education, and commerce, navigating uncertainty while increasing its dependence on technology and online infrastructure. Taken together, these developments unfolded within a broader context of social transition that shaped collective experiences during this period.

Quantitative analysis: Personal values analysis

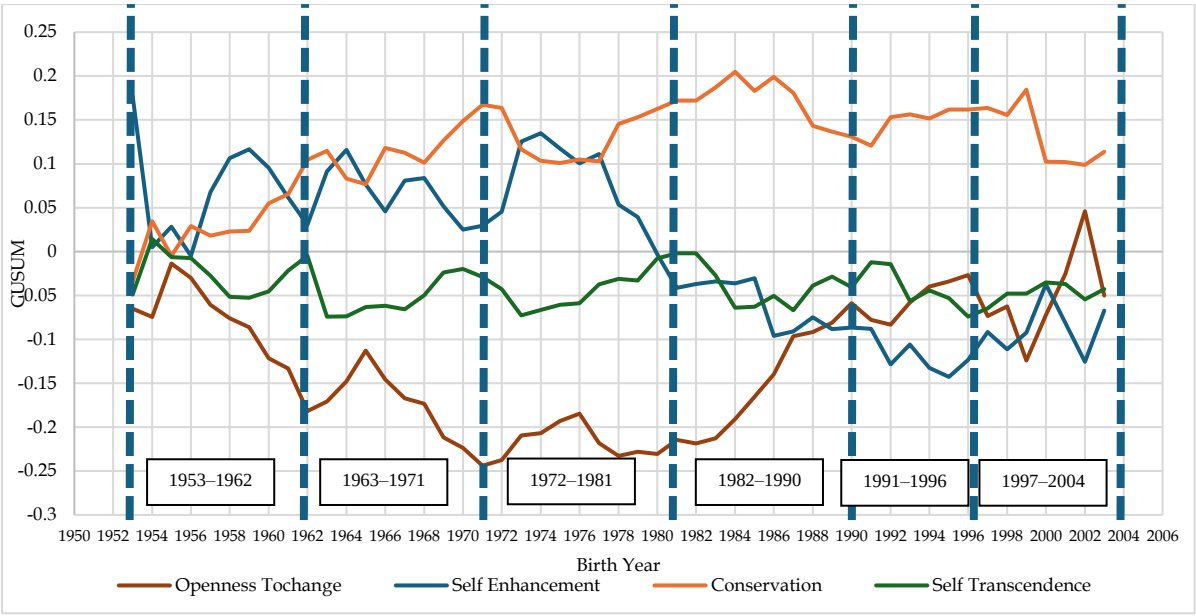
Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Cieciuch, 2022) was employed as the central analytic framework to examine value characteristics across Thai generational cohorts. The quantitative analysis followed a structured, standardized procedure to ensure the comparability and interpretability of personal value measures. The 57 items were used to compute scores for 19 first-order value dimensions, which were subsequently aggregated into four higher-order value categories: Openness to Change, Self-Enhancement, Conservation, and Self-Transcendence. Reliability analysis indicated satisfactory internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the first 19 first-order value dimensions ranged from .581 to .787, which is considered acceptable given the small number of items per dimension (Schwartz & Cieciuch, 2022). At the higher-order level, internal consistency was strong, with alpha coefficients of .877 for Openness to Change, .902 for Self-Enhancement, .903 for Conservation, and .905 for Self-Transcendence. The overall value structure demonstrated excellent reliability (α = .971).

To address individual response bias, the study followed the normalization procedure recommended by Schwartz and Cieciuch (2022). Each respondent's raw value scores were centered by subtracting their personal mean score across all items. These centered scores were then used to compute mean scores for each value dimension and the higher-order categories.

For cross-cohort comparison, value scores were further normalized by subtracting the overall sample mean for each dimension.

This procedure emphasizes relative-value prioritization within individuals rather than absolute-value endorsement, helping attenuate age-related level effects. As a result, the analysis focuses on the internal structure of value hierarchies, which is more appropriate for examining generational value patterns than for capturing life-stage–specific intensity effects.

Figure 2: CUSUM Chart of Standardized Mean Scores for the Four Higher-Order Personal Values (1950–2004 Birth Cohorts)



To explore shifts in value orientations across birth cohorts, this study draws conceptually on Fernández-Durán's (2016) change-point logic. It employs a Cumulative Sum (CUSUM) chart as a descriptive and illustrative tool. The chart was constructed using standardized mean scores of the four higher-order value dimensions. Whereas Fernández-Durán adopted a data-driven approach to cohort identification, the present study follows a mixed-method, historically grounded design in which generational cohorts are defined *a priori* based on shared formative historical experiences. Accordingly, CUSUM is not employed to detect optimal change-points statistically or to derive cohort boundaries inductively from the data, but rather to examine whether observed value trajectories broadly correspond to these historically grounded cohort distinctions.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the CUSUM trajectories provide a visual depiction of gradual, non-linear changes in higher-order value orientations across birth cohorts spanning 1950 to 2004. Several directional shifts are observable in the trajectories; rather than serving as formal breakpoints for cohort construction, these patterns offer illustrative support for variation in relative value prioritization across adjacent historically defined cohorts.

The first cohort, born between 1953 and 1962, exhibits moderate levels of *Openness to Change* and *Self-Enhancement*, along with a slight decline in *Conservation*. The next cohort, 1963–1971, demonstrates an upward trend in both *Openness to Change* and *Self-Enhancement*.

A noticeable shift is observed in the 1972–1981 cohort, where *Self-Enhancement* begins to decline while *Conservation* trends upward. This trajectory continues into the 1982–1990 and 1991–1996 cohorts, both of which show plateauing *Openness to Change* and a more pronounced rise in *Conservation*.

In contrast, the most recent cohort—those born between 1997 and 2004—exhibits a pronounced increase in *Openness to Change* and *Self-Transcendence*, alongside a notable decline in *Conservation*. These patterns indicate systematic variation in relative value prioritization across cohorts, consistent with the historical and socio-cultural contexts underlying the proposed Thai generational framework.

Introducing Thai generational cohorts

This section presents a Thai generational cohort model integrating historical era segmentation and value trajectory analysis (see Table 3). Using qualitative findings, the model identifies key socio-economic and political periods that are likely to have shaped individuals during their impressionable years (ages 17–23). Birth cohorts were determined by mapping backward from each historical era to estimate when individuals reached early adulthood. For example, those born between 1953 and 1962 came of age during political awakening (1971–1980), while those born between 1997 and 2004 entered adulthood amid the COVID-19 crisis (2016–2022). This approach grounds cohort definitions in both historical context and developmental relevance.

Table 3: Thai Generational Cohorts Framework

Cohort Name	Birth Years	Approximate Impression Years	Key Defining Event (2012–2019)
Liberalists	1953–1962	1971–1980	14 October 1973 protests, early globalization
Boom-Xers	1963–1971	1981–1989	Industrial expansion, "Made in Thailand."
Crisis-Xers	1972–1981	1990–1999	1997 Asian Financial Crisis, Internet adoption
Digital Millennials	1982–1990	2000–2008	Economic recovery, smartphone era, e-commerce
Uncertainty Millennials	1991–1996	2009–2015	Political instability, a big flood
Z-cession	1997–2004	2016–2022	King Rama IX's Death, COVID-19, and the Stagnation of the Economy

The generational cohort names in Table 3 reflect Thailand's key socio-historical experiences and corresponding value shifts identified through CUSUM analysis. *Liberalists* (1953–1962) represent the emergence of civic consciousness and openness during a period of political liberalization. *Boom-Xers* (1963–1971) reflect the optimism of industrial growth and the rise in self-enhancement values. *Crisis-Xers* (1972–1981) were shaped by early digitalization and the 1990s economic crisis, leading to heightened caution and increased Conservation values. *Digital Millennials* (1982–1990) matured during an economic recovery and a period of technological optimism, reflected in their Openness to Change and innovation-driven lifestyles. *Uncertainty Millennials* (1991–1996) came of age amid political instability and environmental concerns, leaning toward structure and stability. *Z-cession* (1997–2004), a blend of "Gen Z" and "recession," captures those shaped by the COVID-19 era, marked by economic stagnation and rising Self-Transcendence. This naming system links historical context with psychological development to form a culturally grounded Thai generational model.

Comparing personal values between Thai and U.S. generational cohorts

To examine the value patterns associated with the proposed Thai generational cohorts, cohort-level average normalized value scores were compared with those derived from the U.S. generational framework (Table 4). The results suggest that the Thai framework captures more nuanced variations in value prioritization that align with Thailand's historical and socio-cultural context.

Table 4: Relative Value Prioritization across Thai and U.S. Generational Cohorts

Value	Proposed Thai Framework						U.S. Framework			
	Z-cession	Uncertainty Millennials	Digital Millennials	Crisis-Xers	Boom-Xers	Liberalists	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers
	1997–2004	1991–1996	1982–1990	1972–1981	1963–1971	1953–1962	1997–2004	1981–1996	1965–1980	1953–1964
Basic Individual Values										
Self-Development–Thought	-.006	.031	.000	.010	-.009	-.023	-.006	.014	.003	-.025
Self-Development–Action	-.046	-.013	.019	.006	.023	-.019	-.046	.005	.014	-.015
Stimulation	.021	.046	.027	.010	-.043	-.042	.021	.037	-.019	-.039
Hedonism	.007	-.009	.039	-.012	-.015	-.009	.007	.017	-.019	-.001
Achievement	.017	.012	.015	.007	.009	-.043	.017	.011	.007	-.034
Power Dominance	.010	-.013	.016	-.017	-.022	.026	.010	.002	-.018	.022
Power Resources	-.011	-.021	.001	.001	.020	.001	-.011	-.012	.010	.008
Face	.056	.024	-.024	-.005	-.011	.000	.056	-.002	-.011	.002
Security Personal	-.046	.012	-.021	-.005	.017	.018	-.046	-.010	.011	.014
Security Societal	-.012	.016	-.016	-.005	.019	-.003	-.012	-.004	.009	-.004
Tradition	-.003	-.033	.002	-.003	-.005	.030	-.003	-.012	-.003	.025
Conformity-Rules	.009	.000	-.014	-.013	-.002	.025	.009	-.006	-.007	.018
Conformity-Interpersonal	.019	.012	-.012	-.013	-.017	.022	.019	.005	-.023	.021
Humility	-.047	-.019	-.005	.026	.024	-.010	-.047	-.012	.025	-.003
Universalism-Nature	.026	-.017	-.017	-.016	.021	.017	.026	-.015	.002	.014
Universalism-Concern	.034	-.012	-.003	-.003	.015	-.010	.034	-.006	.007	-.012
Universalism-Tolerance	-.054	-.017	.002	.016	.013	.003	-.054	-.008	.015	.007
Benevolence-Care	.005	-.002	-.015	.016	-.015	.012	.005	-.009	.007	.004
Benevolence-Dependability	.023	.002	.005	.001	-.022	.002	.023	.006	-.011	.000
Four Higher-Order Values										
Openness to Change	-.006	.014	.021	.004	-.011	-.023	-.006	.018	-.005	-.020
Self -Enhancement	.018	.000	.002	-.004	-.001	-.004	.018	.000	-.003	-.001
Conservation	-.014	-.002	-.011	-.002	.006	.014	-.014	-.006	.002	.012
Self-Transcendence	.007	-.009	-.005	.003	.002	.005	.007	-.006	.004	.003

Note: Values reported are cohort-level means of normalized value scores, calculated by centering each value relative to the respondent's overall value profile and the sample mean. Positive values indicate that a given value is prioritized more strongly relative to other values within the cohort, while negative values indicate lower relative prioritization. The table presents descriptive comparisons across predefined generational cohorts under both the proposed Thai and U.S. frameworks. N = 3,433 respondents from the Bangkok Metropolitan Area.

Characteristics of Thai generational cohorts

This section presents a detailed analysis of the distinct personal value profiles of Thai generational cohorts, as derived from both qualitative narratives and quantitative findings. The key psychological and behavioral traits of each cohort are interpreted in light of their unique socio-historical contexts.

Z-cession generation (born 1997–2004)

Political unrest, economic uncertainty, the COVID-19 pandemic, and global conflicts have shaped the Z-cession Generation. These factors have influenced their values and behaviors (see Table 4). They prioritize social image (Face: 0.056), stimulation (0.021), achievement (0.017), and hedonism (0.007), reflecting a desire for recognition, excitement, and success. At the same time, they place less emphasis on personal (-0.046) and societal security (-0.012), indicating diminished expectations of stability. Though moderately inclined toward conformity, they show low humility (-0.047), suggesting confidence and individualism. They value environmental and societal concerns (universalism-nature: 0.026; universalism-concern: 0.034), but exhibit lower tolerance (-0.054), suggesting a more critical or polarized social outlook. Their limited benevolence-care (0.005) contrasts with a stronger emphasis on dependability (0.023), emphasizing trust in relationships over general altruism. Overall, this generation is ambitious, socially conscious, and image-driven, yet less traditional and more cautious in their trust and generosity.

Uncertainty millennials (born 1991–1996)

The Uncertainty Millennials came of age during periods of political instability and major flooding, shaping a mindset focused on stability, introspection, and measured progress. They show a strong inclination toward self-development in thought (0.031) but less so in action (-0.013), highlighting a reflective but less execution-driven approach. While they seek stimulation (0.046), their low hedonism (-0.009) suggests limited interest in indulgent pleasures. They value achievement (0.012) but not power or material dominance, and their concern for social reputation (face: 0.024) is present though not dominant. Security—both personal (0.012) and societal (0.016)—is essential, reflecting a cautious outlook, while low scores in tradition (-0.033) and universalism suggest a progressive yet inward-facing orientation. Their conformity is moderate, and social values like humility, tolerance, and benevolence are relatively neutral or slightly negative. Overall, this cohort appears intellectually driven, security-aware, and moderately ambitious, with a pragmatic yet introspective stance shaped by uncertain formative experiences.

Digital millennials (born 1982–1990)

The Digital Millennials came of age during a time of economic recovery and digital transformation, fostering values centered on action, ambition, and individualism. They favor doing over introspection (self-development in action: 0.019; thought: 0.0) and show strong desires for stimulation (0.027) and hedonism (0.039), indicating a pursuit of excitement and pleasure. While moderately achievement-oriented (0.015), they lean slightly toward influence (power dominance: 0.016) but not materialism (power resources: 0.001). Unlike younger cohorts, they are less concerned with external judgment (face: –0.024) and display low emphasis on security and tradition. Their disregard for conformity and low scores in humility, universalism, and benevolence suggest a self-reliant, pleasure-seeking mindset with limited

collective or environmental focus. Overall, Digital Millennials are pragmatic, thrill-driven, and confident, shaped by optimism and the expanding digital world of their formative years.

Crisis-Xers (born 1972–1981)

The Crisis-Xers came of age during the Asian Financial Crisis (1997), fostering resilience, pragmatism, and modest ambition. Their values reflect a restrained focus on personal growth (self-development: 0.01 thought; 0.006 action) and a slight interest in stimulation (0.01), but low hedonism (–0.012) suggests limited concern for pleasure. Achievement is modest (0.007), and they show little interest in power or material wealth, with negative scores for power dominance (–0.017) and face (–0.005), indicating low concern for authority or social image. They also place minimal importance on security, tradition, and conformity, reinforcing their independent and skeptical stance toward societal norms. However, their relatively high humility (0.026), tolerance (0.016), and benevolence-care (0.016) suggest a grounded, socially considerate outlook. Overall, Crisis-Xers are adaptable, humble, and self-reliant—shaped by hardship to value independence over status and interpersonal care over global ideals.

Boom-Xers (born 1963–1971)

The Boom-Xers were shaped by Thailand's economic boom and the Bubble Economy, fostering a financially driven, security-oriented, and pragmatic outlook. They emphasize action (0.023) over introspection (–0.009) and show low interest in stimulation (–0.043) and hedonism (–0.015), reflecting a practical, risk-averse mindset. With moderate achievement (0.009) and some interest in material security (power resources: 0.02), they are not motivated by dominance (–0.022) or social image (face: –0.011). Security is a clear priority (personal: 0.017; societal: 0.019), though they exhibit little attachment to tradition or conformity. They show strong humility (0.024) and moderate concern for environmental and social issues (universalism-nature: 0.021; concern: 0.015), but low scores in benevolence-care (–0.015) and dependability (–0.022) suggest limited interpersonal generosity. Overall, Boom-Xers are stable, goal-oriented, and socially aware, but less expressive in emotional or relational dimensions.

Liberalists (born 1953–1962)

The Liberalists were shaped by political unrest and landmark protests such as the 14 and 6 October movements, fostering a tradition-conscious, security-focused, and moderately authority-inclined mindset. They show low engagement in personal growth (self-development-thought: –0.023; action: –0.019), low stimulation (–0.042), and minimal interest in achievement (–0.043) or pleasure (hedonism: –0.009), reflecting a stable, pragmatic outlook. While not driven by materialism or social image, they show a notable inclination toward power dominance (0.026), suggesting a respect for authority. They prioritize tradition (0.03), personal security (0.018), and conformity (rules: 0.025; interpersonal: 0.022), favoring order and continuity. Social and environmental values are mixed—low humility and concern for universalism, but moderate care for nature (0.017) and slight benevolence. Overall, Liberalists value structure, tradition, and authority over innovation or ambition, reflecting a worldview shaped by political turbulence and the need for societal stability.

Discussion

This study suggests the need for a Thailand-specific generational framework that captures the nation's unique socio-political, economic, and cultural context. Unlike the broad U.S.-based model (e.g., Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z), the proposed Thai framework offers a more contextually grounded classification. The Thai framework identifies six cohorts—*Liberalists* (1953–1962), *Boom-Xers* (1963–1971), *Crisis-Xers* (1972–1981), *Digital Millennials* (1982–1990), *Uncertainty Millennials* (1991–1996), and *Z-cession* (1997–2004). Each is shaped by national events such as the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, political unrest, rapid digital transformation, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach provides a more nuanced and culturally relevant understanding of generational values differences in Thailand.

The discussion that follows interprets these findings by explicitly linking the historically grounded cohort definitions developed in the qualitative phase to patterns observed in the quantitative analysis of relative-value prioritization across cohorts.

Key characteristics of the Thai generation framework

Thai generational values differ significantly from those found in Western societies. Drawing on Schwartz's Theory of Basic Personal Values, the quantitative results indicate that younger Thai cohorts, particularly the Z-cession (1997–2004), tend to place greater relative emphasis on face (0.056) and conformity-interpersonal (0.019) than Western cohorts. These patterns reflect enduring cultural expectations surrounding the maintenance of social reputation and avoidance of public embarrassment, which remain salient features of Thai social life across generations. In contrast, Western Generation Z is often characterized by stronger orientations toward individualism and self-expression, reflecting different socio-cultural influences (Egri & Ralston, 2004).

Similarly, Thailand's Boom-Xers came of age during a period of rapid economic expansion, a context that appears to be associated with a stronger relative emphasis on personal (0.017) and societal (0.019) security. These value priorities are consistent with efforts to consolidate and protect economic gains achieved during periods of growth. In contrast, American Generation X, shaped by economic stagnation and declining institutional trust, has been shown to emphasize post-materialist and self-actualizing values through pragmatism and individualism rather than idealism (Inglehart, 1997).

The comparative analysis also highlights limitations in applying U.S.-based generational classifications to the Thai context. The U.S. framework categorizes Gen X as a single group (1965–1980), whereas the Thai framework differentiates between Boom-Xers (1963–1971) and Crisis-Xers (1972–1981), reflecting their distinct economic and technological exposures. Similarly, the U.S. model defines Millennials (1981–1996), while the Thai model distinguishes between Digital Millennials (1982–1990) and Uncertainty Millennials (1991–1996), capturing differences between cohorts shaped by economic growth versus political and environmental instability.

Importantly, these generational interpretations do not stem solely from qualitative expectations but emerge from the convergence between historically grounded cohort contexts

and the systematic differences in relative value prioritization observed in the quantitative analysis.

These generational patterns in Thailand—particularly the stronger emphasis on face, conformity, and security among particular cohorts—should be interpreted within the broader context of Thai cultural values. Komin (1990) conceptualized Thai values as hierarchical and relational systems, in which values such as face, interpersonal harmony, and security are prioritized differently depending on social roles and contextual pressures rather than functioning as fixed individual traits. From this perspective, the generational differences identified in this study reflect shifts in the relative salience of value dimensions across cohorts shaped by socio-historical conditions, rather than fundamental departures from enduring Thai cultural value structures.

Key similarities and differences between Thai and U.S. generational cohorts

While some Thai generations closely resemble their U.S. counterparts, others exhibit unique characteristics shaped by Thailand's socio-economic trajectory, political events, and the pace of historical development. This section compares the values of Thai generations found in this study with previous research relating to U.S. generations (Egri & Ralston, 2004; Williams & Page, 2011)

- Liberalists (1953–1962) share similarities with the U.S. Silent Generation (1925–1945). Having grown up during political instability and protests, the Liberalists emphasize tradition, security, and authority, much like the Silent Generation, which experienced World War II and the Great Depression, shaping their pragmatic and cautious mindset.

- Boom-Xers (1963–1971) resemble U.S. Baby Boomers (1946–1964). Growing up during Thailand's rapid economic expansion and the Bubble Economy, Boom-Xers prioritize financial security, stability, and material success, much as U.S. Baby Boomers were shaped by post-war economic prosperity and industrial growth.

- Crisis-Xers (1972–1981) align with U.S. Generation X (1965–1980). Experiencing the Asian Financial Crisis (1997), this Thai cohort developed resilience, pragmatism, and self-reliance, mirroring Gen X's independence and skepticism, which emerged in response to economic uncertainty and shifting social structures in the U.S.

- Digital Millennials (1982–1990) are comparable to U.S. Millennials (1981–1996). Shaped by economic recovery and digital transformation, they exhibit individualism, adaptability, and a strong affinity for technology, much like U.S. Millennials, who grew up during the rise of the internet and globalization.

- Uncertainty Millennials (1991–1996) are a unique Thai generational cohort. Unlike any U.S. generation, this group was shaped by political unrest, major natural disasters, and economic fluctuations, making them more pragmatic, security-conscious, and adaptable than their Western counterparts. While U.S. Millennials focus on work-life balance, Thai Uncertainty Millennials emphasize stability and strategic decision-making.

- Z-cession (1997–2004) closely resembles U.S. Generation Z (1997–2012). Having grown up amid political instability, economic challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic, both

generations display social awareness, digital fluency, and a heightened concern for reputation and social standing. However, Thai Z-cession values conformity more than their Western peers, who prioritize activism and self-expression.

A key insight from this study is that Thailand's generational shifts tend to lag behind those in the U.S. due to differences in economic development, technological advancements, and political stability. While U.S. Baby Boomers enjoyed post-war prosperity, Thailand's Boom-Xers experienced economic growth later. Similarly, Thailand's digital transformation occurred after the U.S. tech boom, meaning Thai Digital Millennials experienced technological exposure at a pace different from that of U.S. Millennials.

Moreover, Thailand's slower transition to a service-based, knowledge-driven economy delayed shifts in work culture and social mobility, leading to generational values developing at a slightly different pace. For example, U.S. Millennials adopted work-life balance and gig economy trends earlier, while Thai Millennials were still adjusting to economic changes and political instability. The Z-cession generation in Thailand is more conservative than U.S. Gen Z, as Thailand's socio-political environment continues to shape a need for security and reputation management over self-expression.

Theoretical and practical contributions

Theoretical contributions

This study is among the first to systematically develop a Thai generational framework, providing a culturally and historically relevant classification that better reflects Thailand's unique societal changes compared to existing Western models. This study contributes to the literature on generational cohort theory by challenging the universal applicability of Western generational models and demonstrating the need for context-specific classifications. Unlike the widely used U.S. generational framework, which does not fully capture the socio-cultural and economic experiences unique to Thailand, the proposed Thai framework offers a more precise segmentation of generational groups. By incorporating major national events, such as the Asian Financial Crisis (1997), digital transformation (2000s), political instability (2010s), and the COVID-19 pandemic, this study provides a more locally relevant understanding of how Thai generations differ in values and behaviors. This contributes to the broader discourse on generational theory, reinforcing the argument that generational identity is shaped not only by age but also by historical and socio-economic influences that vary across cultures.

Furthermore, this study extends the application of Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values to generational research by identifying distinct value patterns across Thai generations. The findings highlight that while some values, such as achievement and openness to change, shift across generations, others, such as face and societal security, remain deeply embedded in Thai cultural norms. Unlike Western societies, where individualism and self-direction play a dominant role among younger generations, Thai youth, particularly those born during the Z-cession (1997–2004), exhibit a strong emphasis on social conformity and societal expectations (Salinero et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023). This study reinforces the importance of integrating cultural perspectives into generational analysis, demonstrating that generational cohorts do not evolve uniformly across societies but rather in response to historical disruptions, economic changes, and deeply ingrained cultural values.

Practical contributions

This study offers practical implications for both businesses and policymakers by identifying culturally specific value orientations across Thai generational cohorts. For businesses, the Thai generational framework enables more precise market segmentation. Younger cohorts such as the Z-cession (1997–2004) and the Uncertainty Millennials (1991–1996) emphasize values such as face, stimulation, and self-development, while placing less importance on security and tradition. Marketing strategies targeting these groups should focus on digital platforms, influencer engagement, and socially responsible branding that enhances reputation and personal relevance. In contrast, Boom-Xers (1963–1971) and Liberalists (1953–1962) show a relative prioritization of security and tradition compared to other value dimensions. This pattern suggests that, for these cohorts, communication strategies emphasizing consistency, product quality, and trust may be more salient than appeals centered on change.

In workforce management, younger cohorts tend to place greater emphasis on autonomy, flexibility, and meaningful work aligned with personal development, pointing to the relevance of hybrid work arrangements, continuous learning opportunities, and purpose-driven leadership. Older cohorts, by contrast, tend to place greater emphasis on job security, structured roles, and organizational stability, implying the importance of transparent advancement structures and formal management systems. Tailoring human resource practices to these relative value orientations may improve engagement and retention across age groups. These patterns, however, should be interpreted with caution. Orientations toward security, tradition, and employment stability may reflect an interaction between cohort-specific formative experiences and life-stage considerations, particularly given the data's cross-sectional nature.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for differentiated interventions. Younger generations, shaped by economic uncertainty and digital transformation, require support through entrepreneurship programs, digital upskilling, and employment flexibility. Older generations, who emphasize stability and tradition, benefit from strong retirement systems, accessible healthcare, and social protection policies. The study also cautions against using Western generational models in Thailand, as they may overlook local historical and cultural factors. Adopting a Thai-specific framework allows for more accurate, effective strategies in marketing, workforce development, and public policy.

Limitations and future research

A key limitation of this study concerns the use of cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to fully disentangle generational cohort effects from life-stage (aging) effects. Although the analysis employs normalization techniques to reduce individual response-style bias and age-related level effects, some observed value patterns—particularly those related to security, tradition, and employment stability—may partially reflect life-stage concerns rather than stable cohort-specific orientations. Longitudinal or age–period–cohort designs are therefore required to confirm whether these value priorities persist as cohorts age or evolve across the life course.

By incorporating key national events and socio-economic transformations, this research lays the groundwork for understanding generational differences in Thailand. However, as an initial attempt to structure Thai generational cohorts, further research is needed to validate and refine the framework across different populations and social contexts. Future studies may

apply this classification to various domains of Thai society, including consumer behavior, workplace dynamics, social mobility, and political engagement, to strengthen its empirical robustness and practical relevance.

While this study provides insight into value-based generational segmentation, it does not directly examine how these values translate into observable behaviors. Future research should therefore investigate the behavioral implications of generational value differences, such as consumer decision-making preferences, financial behaviors, career aspirations, and patterns of digital adoption. Employing longitudinal or panel data would further enable researchers to track how generational attitudes and behaviors evolve in response to economic shifts, technological change, and social transformation.

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