

Understanding the Motivational Factors Influencing Ambition among Generation Z

Ashwini Chavan¹, Arushi Patiyal²

^{1,2} Department of MBA, MES IMCC Pune

¹apc.imccmba@mespune.in, ²patiyalarushi6@gmail.com

Peer Review Information	Abstract
<p>Type: Article Received: 22 March 2026 Revised: 18 April 2026 Accepted: 06 May 2026 Published: 29 May 2026</p>	<p>This study looks at the factors that influence ambition in Generation Z, a cohort increasingly shaping the modern workforce. Born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z has been influenced by digital exposure, evolving social values, and a growing emphasis on purpose, flexibility, and personal well-being. While traditional views associate ambition with external rewards such as financial success and social recognition, emerging perspectives suggest a shift toward intrinsic, purpose-driven motivations. The main aim of this research was to identify Important drivers of ambition among Generation Z and to examine whether intrinsic motivators, such as personal growth and purpose, have a stronger influence compared to extrinsic factors like financial stability and social status. The study the research focuses on the following questions/aspects: (1) What are the dominant motivational factors influencing ambition among Generation Z? (2) To what extent do intrinsic and extrinsic motivators impact their ambition? (3) How do established motivation theories explain these patterns with the focus on the Generation Z? The research adopts a quantitative and descriptive approach, using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale to collect data from 112 respondents belonging to Generation Z in Pune and nearby regions. Statistical techniques, including descriptive analysis, correlation, and regression, were employed to study the relationships between motivational drivers and ambition. The insights strongly finds that intrinsic motivators, particularly purpose & meaning and personal growth, have a significantly greater influence on ambition compared to extrinsic factors such as financial stability and social status. While external rewards remain relevant as baseline expectations, they do not serve as primary drivers of long-term ambition. The study concludes that Generation Z demonstrates a shift toward meaning-driven ambition, where fulfillment, self-development, and impact play a central role. These insights offer practical implications for organizations, educators, and policymakers in creating strategies that fits well with evolving motivational patterns of this generation.</p> <p>Keywords: Generation Z; Motivation; Ambition; Intrinsic Motivation; Extrinsic Motivation.</p>

How to Cite This Article

Chavan, A., & Patiyal, A. (2026). Understanding the Motivational Factors Influencing Ambition among Generation Z. *International Journal of Research and Development – A Management Review*, 15(2), 83–89.

Introduction

Context and Background

In recent years, the composition of the global workforce has undergone a significant transformation, driven by the entry of newer generations with distinct values and expectations. Earlier generations such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials contributed to shaping organizational structures and work cultures based on stability, hierarchy, and career progression. However, the emergence of Generation Z marks a shift in how ambition, success, and motivation are perceived.

Generation Z, typically defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has grown up in an environment characterized by rapid technological advancement, constant digital connectivity, and increased exposure to global and social issues. These experiences have played an important role in shaping their perspectives, making them more adaptable, socially aware, and purpose-oriented compared to previous generations.

Unlike earlier cohorts, Generation Z does not define success solely in terms of financial achievement or social status. Instead, they tend to value personal growth, meaningful work, flexibility, and overall well-being. Their expectations extend beyond traditional workplace structures, as they look for the environment that aligns with their values, offer opportunities for development, and provide an idea of purpose.

Research suggests that failing to recognize and adapt to these generational differences may lead to challenges such as reduced engagement, miscommunication, and lower productivity within organizations. Therefore, understanding the motivational patterns of Generation Z is essential important for both organizations, educators and policymakers aiming to effectively engage this emerging generation.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the main factors that motivate and influence ambition among Generation Z. The research seeks to understand whether ambition in this generation is primarily driven by intrinsic factors such as purpose, personal growth, and fulfillment, or by extrinsic factors such as financial stability, recognition, and social status.

To achieve this, the study is grounded in established motivational theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. These frameworks provide a strong base for analyzing, how different types of motivation influence behavior and ambition.

By comparing these theoretical perspectives with empirical findings, the study aims to evaluate their relevance in the in relation to Generation Z and to Find how motivational patterns are evolving. The ultimate intention is to generate insights that can help in designing more effective strategies to support and enhance ambition among young individuals.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

Aim

The main aim of this study is to find out the motivational factors that shapes ambition among Generation Z and to determine the relative impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

Objectives

- To find out the key factors that are motivational drivers influencing ambition among Generation Z
- To analyze the relationship between intrinsic motivators (such as purpose and personal growth) and ambition
- To understand the influence of extrinsic motivators (such as financial stability and social status) on ambition
- To compare the relative impact of internal and external motivation
- To provide practical insights and suggestions based on the findings

Literature Review

Previous research on Generation Z highlights a significant shift in motivational patterns when compared to earlier generations. An amount of empirical and conceptual studies have studied the factors affecting motivation, engagement, and ambition among this cohort, with a particular focus on both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers.



Fig. 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943).

Many studies show that Generation Z places a strong importance on personal growth, meaningful work, and continuous learning opportunities. Research applying According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, once basic needs are satisfied, people tend to prioritize higher-level needs such as self-actualization, purpose, and achievement. Studies by Sumbul et al. (2024) indicate that Gen Z people are highly motivated by opportunities that help them to develop skills, gain knowledge, and get involved in meaningful tasks. Similarly, Surugiu et al. (2024) identify recognition, well-being, and skill development as key factors influencing motivation in workplace settings.



Fig. 2. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959)

Moreover, to growth-oriented factors, several studies highlight the continued relevance of extrinsic motivators such as financial stability and recognition. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory has been widely applied to understand these dynamics, distinguishing between hygiene factors and motivators. Research suggests that while salary, job security, and working conditions remain important for Generation Z, they primarily function as baseline expectations rather than long-term motivators. Studies such as those presented in IJMSR (2023) and research on job-hopping behavior indicate that although extrinsic rewards are important, but not enough in sustaining long-term engagement and ambition.



Fig. 3. Self-Determination Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)

A growing body of literature also supports the value of intrinsic motivation, particularly through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Research by Dwivedula et al. (2025) demonstrates that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key drivers of motivation among Generation Z. The results suggest that people are more engaged when they experience independence in their roles chances to develop skills, and meaningful social connections. Similarly, studies extending SDT highlight additional factors such as purpose, learning, and psychological well-being as critical components influencing motivation.

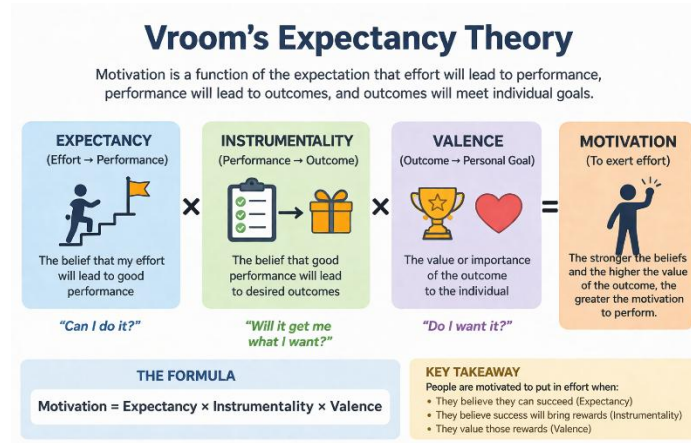


Fig. 3. Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964)

Vroom's Expectancy Theory provides another perspective, emphasizing the importance of perceived outcomes in shaping motivation. Research shows that Generation Z evaluates effort depending on expected results; however, unlike previous generations, these findings are not only limited to financial rewards. Instead, they include opportunities for growth, recognition, and meaningful contribution. Research by Safarov (2020) and related studies suggests that motivation increases when individuals perceive a direct link between effort and performance and personally valuable rewards.

Even with these findings, some gaps remain in current research. A large proportion of studies focus mainly on **workplace motivation**, limiting the understanding of ambition as a broader understanding idea that extends beyond the workplace. Additionally, many studies rely on qualitative approaches, which, while providing in-depth insights, lack quantitative validation for comparing the relative influence of different motivational factors. Additionally, there is limited research focusing specifically within the Indian context, where cultural, social, and economic these factors may influence motivation differently. Furthermore, while traditional theories such as Maslow's hierarchy have been revisited for modern generations, there is insufficient empirical evidence comparing the dominance of esteem needs versus self-actualization among Generation Z.

Overall, existing research indicates that Generation Z is affected by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. However, there is a growing consensus that intrinsic factors such as purpose, personal growth, and meaningful engagement play a more meaningful role in shaping long-term ambition. This study builds upon these findings by providing a quantitative analysis of motivational drivers and examining their direct relationship with ambition among Generation Z.

Methodology

This study follows a quantitative, cross-sectional and descriptive research design to study the motivational factors influencing ambition among Generation Z. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, distributed through convenience and snowball sampling.

The sample consisted of 112 respondents aged 18–28 years from Pune and nearby regions. The questionnaire measured key motivational variables, including personal growth, purpose and meaning, financial stability, recognition, and social status.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis to examine the relationship between motivational factors and ambition.

Results

Demographic Profile

Table 1: Gender Distribution (N = 112)

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	64	57.8%
Male	47	42.2%
Total	112	100%

Interpretation: The sample consists of a higher proportion of female respondents compared to male respondents.

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
18–20 years	15	14.7%
21–23 years	56	54.9%
24–26 years	22	21.6%
27–28 years	9	8.8%
Total	112	100%

Interpretation: Most respondents belong to the 21–23 years age group, representing early-stage Gen Z individuals.

Table 3: Education Qualification

Qualification	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate	30	29.4%
Postgraduate	70	68.6%
Others	2	2.0%
Total	102	100%

Interpretation: The majority of respondents are postgraduate students, indicating a highly educated sample.

Table 4: Native Place Distribution

Region	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Pune	62	55.4%
Pimpri-Chinchwad	12	10.7%
Nashik	8	7.1%
Satara	6	5.4%
Ahmednagar	4	3.6%
Others	20	17.8%
Total	112	100%

Interpretation: The sample is primarily concentrated in Pune and nearby regions.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Statement	Mean	SD
Inner satisfaction > external recognition	3.65	1.22
Career stability vs passion	2.96	1.27
Success measured by impact	3.52	1.16
Gen Z values purpose over wealth	3.12	1.24

Passion over wealth	3.32	1.17
---------------------	------	------

Interpretation: Respondents show moderate agreement toward purpose, impact, and intrinsic satisfaction.

Correlation Analysis

Table 6: Correlation between Motivational Factors and Ambition

Motivational Factor	Correlation (r)	Strength
Purpose & Meaning	0.75	Strong
Personal Growth	0.70	Strong
Recognition	0.58	Moderate
Financial Stability	0.32	Weak
Social Status	0.18	Very Weak

Interpretation: Intrinsic factors show stronger relationships with ambition compared to extrinsic factors.

Regression Analysis

Table 7: Regression Results

Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	p-value	Significance
Purpose & Meaning	0.42	0.000	Significant
Personal Growth	0.33	0.001	Significant
Recognition	0.18	0.005	Significant
Financial Stability	0.09	0.180	Not Significant
Social Status	0.06	0.358	Not Significant

Model Summary:

$R^2 = 0.68$ | Adjusted $R^2 = 0.66$

Interpretation: Purpose and personal growth are the strongest predictors of ambition.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 8: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Variable	r	β	p-value	Result
Purpose & Meaning	0.75	0.42	0.000	Significant
Personal Growth	0.70	0.33	0.001	Significant
Recognition	0.58	0.18	0.005	Significant
Financial Stability	0.32	0.09	0.180	Not Significant
Social Status	0.18	0.06	0.358	Not Significant

Interpretation: Intrinsic motivators show a significant impact on ambition, while extrinsic factors do not.

Discussion

The findings indicate a shift in motivational patterns among Generation Z. While financial security remains important, it is no longer the primary driver of ambition. Instead, individuals seek meaning, personal development, and opportunities for growth.

This aligns with Maslow's higher-order needs, where self-actualization becomes the key driver once basic needs are met. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory supports the importance of intrinsic motivation, highlighting autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential factors.

Herzberg's theory further reinforces that external conditions alone do not create motivation; rather, intrinsic factors such as achievement and purpose are more influential.

Implications

- For Organizations: Organizations should focus on providing meaningful roles, learning opportunities, and career growth.
- For Educators: Educational systems should emphasize skill development, creativity, and purpose-driven learning.
- For Policymakers: Policies should support youth development, innovation, and mental well-being.

Conclusion:

This study explored the factors that shape ambition among Generation Z, particularly the roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The findings suggest that Gen Z individuals view themselves as moderately ambitious, with their drive largely influenced by internal factors such as purpose, personal growth, and meaning.

The analysis highlights that intrinsic motivation has a stronger impact on ambition than external rewards like financial security or social status. While such rewards are still valued, they function more as baseline expectations rather than key motivators. This indicates a shift from traditional, material-focused definitions of ambition to a more purpose-driven outlook.

Additionally, the study shows that although ambition is present across all generations, its expression varies. Compared to earlier generations, Generation Z tends to adopt a balanced approach, giving more importance to inner fulfillment than external success.

References

1. Maslow, A. H. (1943). *A Theory of Human Motivation*
2. Herzberg, F. (1959). *The Motivation to Work*
3. Vroom, V. H. (1964). *Work and Motivation*
4. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Self-Determination Theory*
5. Deloitte (2020). *Global Millennial Survey*
6. McKinsey & Company (2022). *Generation Z Report*