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1. Introduction and Background

Employee retention has become an important issue within the hospitality industry due to persistent labour shortages and high employee turnover. High staff turnover can negatively affect service quality, organisational performance and recruitment costs. As a result, retaining employees has become a priority for many organisations operating within the sector. Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents an increasing proportion of the workforce. Compared with previous generations, younger employees often place greater importance on work-life balance, career development, supportive leadership and organisational culture. Understanding their expectations is important for organisations seeking to improve employee satisfaction and reduce turnover. Therefore, this study focuses on Generation Z employees working in the UK hospitality industry and aims to provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing employee retention.

2. Problem Statement

Employee turnover remains a major challenge within the hospitality industry, increasing recruitment costs and affecting service quality (Karatepe and Kilic, 2009). At the same time, Generation Z employees have different expectations regarding leadership, career development and work-life balance (Schroth, 2019; Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021). Although employee retention has been widely studied, existing research has mainly focused on employees in general and has often adopted quantitative approaches. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how Generation Z employees within the UK hospitality industry perceive the factors influencing their decision to remain with an organisation. Therefore, further qualitative research is required.

3. Research Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the factors influencing employee retention among Generation Z employees in the UK hospitality industry.

4. Research Objectives

To explore the workplace factors that Generation Z employees perceive as important within the UK hospitality industry.

To explore how Generation Z employees perceive the influence of pay and benefits on their decision to remain with an organisation.

To explore how leadership and management practices influence employee retention among Generation Z employees.

To investigate how work-life balance and career development opportunities influence employee retention among Generation Z employees.

5. Research Question

How do Generation Z employees perceive the factors influencing employee retention in the UK hospitality industry?

Sub-questions

What workplace factors are considered important by Generation Z employees?

How do pay and benefits influence their decision to remain with an organisation?

How do leadership and management practices affect employee retention?

How do work-life balance and career development opportunities influence their intention to remain in the hospitality industry?

Keywords

Employee retention

Employee turnover

Generation Z

Hospitality industry

Work-life balance

Leadership

Organisational culture

Career development

Employee engagement

Job satisfaction

Employee motivation

Millennial workforce

6. Literature Review

6.1 Generation Z Characteristics and Workplace Expectations

Generation Z represents an increasingly important part of the workforce and is associated with different values and expectations compared with previous generations. According to Ozkan and Solmaz (2015), Generation Z employees place greater importance on flexibility, career development and work-life balance. Similarly, Schroth (2019) suggested that younger employees value meaningful work, continuous feedback and supportive working environments. Furthermore, Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) argued that Generation Z employees expect open communication and opportunities for personal and professional growth. However, much of the existing literature examines Generation Z across different industries, with limited attention given to the hospitality sector. Although previous studies have identified several expectations associated with Generation Z employees, most research has focused on different sectors and has adopted broad generational perspectives. Consequently, limited attention has been

given to how these expectations are experienced and interpreted by Generation Z employees within the UK hospitality industry, indicating the need for further qualitative research.

6.2 Employee Retention in the Hospitality Industry

Employee retention remains a significant challenge within the hospitality industry due to high turnover rates and labour shortages. According to Karatepe and Kilic (2009), high employee turnover can negatively affect service quality and organisational performance. Similarly, Goh and Okumus (2020) found that working conditions, employee engagement and career opportunities play an important role in reducing turnover intentions. In contrast, Kim and Jogaratnam (2010) argued that supportive leadership and organisational support may have a greater influence on employee retention than financial rewards alone. Although previous studies have identified several factors affecting retention, most have focused on employees in general rather than specific generations. However, previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the most influential factors affecting employee retention. While Kim and Jogaratnam (2010) emphasised the importance of organisational support and leadership, Goh and Okumus (2020) highlighted the role of working conditions and career opportunities. These differences suggest that employee retention is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors rather than a single variable.

6.3 Leadership and Organisational Culture

Leadership and organisational culture have been widely recognised as important factors influencing employee retention. Northouse (2022) suggested that effective leadership can improve employee engagement and job satisfaction. Similarly, Schein and Schein (2017) argued that organisational culture influences employees' behaviours and relationships within the workplace. In addition, Karatepe and Olugbade (2017) found that employees who perceive greater support from managers are more likely to remain with an organisation. However, limited research has explored how Generation Z employees in the hospitality industry perceive leadership and organisational culture in relation to employee retention. In contrast, some researchers argue that organisational culture may have a greater influence on employee retention than leadership itself, as shared values and workplace relationships contribute to employee satisfaction and commitment (Schein and Schein, 2017). These findings suggest that leadership and organisational culture are closely interconnected. While some studies emphasise

managerial support, others argue that organisational culture has a greater influence on employee commitment and retention. However, limited research has explored how Generation Z employees within the UK hospitality industry interpret these factors, indicating a need for further qualitative investigation.

6.4 Work-Life Balance and Career Development

Work-life balance and career development opportunities are important factors affecting employees' decisions to remain with an organisation. Deery and Jago (2015) suggested that poor work-life balance may increase turnover intentions within the hospitality industry. Similarly, Al Mamun and Hasan (2017) found that career development opportunities contribute positively to employee commitment and retention. Moreover, Schroth (2019) and Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) argued that Generation Z employees place considerable importance on continuous learning and professional development.

These findings suggest that work-life balance and career development opportunities play an important role in employee retention. However, previous studies have mainly focused on employees in general and have paid limited attention to Generation Z employees working within the UK hospitality industry. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how younger employees interpret the importance of these factors, highlighting the need for further qualitative research.

6.5 Research Gap

Although employee retention has received considerable attention in previous studies, existing research has mainly focused on employees in general and has frequently adopted quantitative approaches. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how Generation Z employees working in the UK hospitality industry perceive the factors influencing their decision to remain with an organisation. Therefore, further qualitative research is needed to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences and perceptions.

7. Research Methodology

According to Robson and McCartan (2016), qualitative research is particularly useful when seeking to obtain detailed insights into complex social phenomena and participants' experiences. Therefore, this chapter outlines the philosophical assumptions, research approach, research design, data collection methods and ethical considerations adopted in this study.

7.1 Research Philosophy

This study adopts an interpretivist research philosophy, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and individuals may interpret experiences differently (Saunders et al., 2023). Interpretivism is considered appropriate because the study aims to explore the experiences and perceptions of Generation Z employees regarding employee retention in the UK hospitality industry (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). This interpretivist perspective is consistent with the paradigmatic discussions presented by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), who emphasised the importance of understanding meanings and experiences within social contexts.

7.2 Research Approach

An inductive approach will be adopted in this study. Inductive research aims to develop understanding from participants' experiences rather than testing existing theories (Bryman and Bell, 2023). This approach is considered appropriate because the study seeks to explore how Generation Z employees perceive the factors influencing employee retention.

7.3 Research Design

This study will employ a qualitative research design. Qualitative research enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences and perceptions rather than measuring variables numerically (Flick, 2023). Therefore, a qualitative approach is considered suitable for addressing the research question (Creswell and Creswell, 2023).

7.4 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews will be used as the primary method of data collection. This method allows participants to share their experiences and perspectives in depth while providing flexibility during the interview process (Bryman and Bell, 2023). Open-ended questions will be used to encourage participants to discuss their views regarding employee retention. The interview questions will be included in Appendix A. Interviews will be conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' availability and preferences. This flexibility is expected to improve accessibility and encourage participation.

7.5 Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling will be used to select participants with relevant experience relating to the research topic (Saunders et al., 2023). The sample will consist of approximately 8-12 Generation Z employees currently working within the UK hospitality industry. However, the final sample size will depend on data saturation, which occurs when no new themes emerge from the collected data (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Participants will be selected based on their age and current employment within the UK hospitality industry to ensure that they possess relevant experience relating to the research topic.

7.6 Data Analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible approach used to identify and interpret patterns within qualitative data. The analysis will follow six stages, including familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and producing the final report. This approach is considered appropriate because it enables a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding employee retention.

7.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations will be carefully addressed throughout the research process. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study and informed consent will be obtained before conducting the interviews (Saunders et al., 2023). Participation will be voluntary, and participants will have the right to withdraw at any stage. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by removing identifiable information, and all collected data will be stored securely in accordance with GDPR requirements and university ethical guidelines (Bryman and Bell, 2023). The researcher will also ensure that participants are not exposed to any physical or psychological harm.

7.8 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is important in qualitative research to ensure the credibility of the findings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability contribute to trustworthiness. In this study, trustworthiness will be enhanced by maintaining a clear research process and collecting data from participants with relevant experience. In addition, maintaining an audit trail throughout the research process will help improve the dependability and confirmability of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Similarly, Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2018) argued that credibility and transparency are essential in ensuring rigour within qualitative research.

7.9 Research Limitations

Several limitations may affect this study. Firstly, the relatively small sample size and purposive sampling technique may limit the generalisability of the findings. Secondly, participants' responses may be influenced by personal experiences and subjective interpretations. In addition, time constraints and limited access to participants may restrict the amount of data collected. Despite these limitations, the qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it provides rich insights into participants' experiences. Furthermore, the findings may not be transferable to other industries or countries due to the specific context of the UK hospitality sector. However, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the experiences of Generation Z employees.

8. Project Plan and Timeline

A realistic timeline is essential to ensure the successful completion of the research project. The initial stage will involve conducting a literature review and designing the research methodology. This will be followed by participant recruitment and data collection through semi-structured interviews. After data collection, the interview transcripts will be analysed using thematic analysis. The final stages will involve interpreting the findings, writing the report and reviewing the completed work before submission. A detailed Gantt chart outlining the research stages and deadlines is provided in Appendix B. Effective time management is essential to ensure that each stage of the research process is completed systematically and within the proposed timeframe (Saunders et al., 2023).

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Appendix A – Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Introductory Questions

- 1.How long have you been working in the hospitality industry?
- 2.What is your current role within the hospitality industry?
- 3.What attracted you to work in the hospitality sector?

Main Questions

- 1.What factors are most important to you when deciding whether to remain with an organisation?
- 2.How do you perceive the influence of pay and benefits on your decision to stay with your current employer?
- 3.How do leadership and management practices affect your experience at work?
- 4.How important is work-life balance to you, and how does it influence your intention to remain with an organisation?
- 5.How do career development and training opportunities influence your decision to stay with an employer?
- 6.What aspects of organisational culture do you value most?
- 7.Have you ever considered leaving your current organisation? If yes, what factors influenced your decision?
- 8.In your opinion, what could employers do to improve employee retention among Generation Z employees?

Possible Prompt Questions

- 1.Could you tell me more about that?
- 2.Could you give an example?
- 3.Why do you think that is important?
- 4.How did that influence your decision?
- 5.Can you explain what you mean by that?
- 6.Could you describe your experience in more detail?

Appendix B - Gantt Chart

Activities	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
Literature review	•	•				
Research design	•					
Ethical approval	•					
Participant recruitment		•				
Conducting interviews		•	•			
Data transcription			•			
Data analysis			•	•		
Writing the report				•	•	
Final review and editing					•	•
Submission						•