

Beyond profit: A phenomenological exploration of Generation Z's entrepreneurial motivations and the integration of financial and social value

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines how Generation Z conceptualises profit and how these perceptions shape their entrepreneurial motivations and strategies. Traditional economic theories define profit as financial gain. However, Generation Z entrepreneurs integrate social impact, innovation, and personal fulfilment into their business models. Existing literature largely focuses on generational comparisons without deeply exploring how this cohort reconciles financial and non-financial objectives.

Research Design & Methods: Using a phenomenological approach, we conducted in-depth interviews to capture their lived experiences. The interpretivist paradigm enables a nuanced understanding of profit as both a motivational driver and a business goal.

Findings: The results revealed that profit for Generation Z is not merely materialistic but is intertwined with meaning, value creation, and social impact. Respondents expressed that profit must align with personal satisfaction, authenticity, and the desire to contribute positively to society. This indicates a shift from traditional economic views to a more holistic and value-driven understanding of entrepreneurial success.

Implications & Recommendations: The results indicate that entrepreneurial education, policy, and support programs must adapt to these changing perceptions by fostering business models that combine economic engines with social value creation. Identity, creativity, and meaning construction are important factors governing the entrepreneurial imagination of younger cohorts, and stakeholders need to appreciate this.

Contribution & Value Added: The present research is novel in its theoretical approach by integrating McClelland's achievement motivation theory with shared value theory and sustainable innovation theory to expand on entrepreneurial motivation theories by examining how Generation Z constructs profit as a multidimensional concept involving financial, psychological, and social facets. It also attempts to extend the profit function theory by positing profit as a form of purposive identity construction and social capital. As for practical implications, the study makes recommendations for educators, policymakers, and business practitioners who seek to advance entrepreneurial education and business models that resonate with the values of Generation Z, especially in the context of ethics, imagination, the creative economy, and the digital world.

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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has undergone significant evolution, particularly in the digital era. No longer limited to capital accumulation and risk-bearing, entrepreneurial activity now embraces creativity, technology-driven innovation, and socially oriented goals (Saeedikiya *et al.*, 2024). Notably, Generation Z, a cohort shaped by unprecedented access to information, digital ecosystems, and global interconnectivity, drives this transformation (Saeedikiya *et al.*, 2024; Twenge, 2023). Generation Z, typically defined as those born between 1996 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019), exhibits a strong entrepreneurial orientation. However, their motivations tend to diverge from previous generations. According to the Deloitte Global 2023 Generation Z and Millennial Survey, 46% of Generation Z respondents aspire to become entrepreneurs and 25% are already engaged in freelance or side work, driven not merely by financial gain but by a desire for better work-life balance (46%), a sense of purpose and meaning (39%), and alignment with their values (36%). Meanwhile, while 62% express concern about climate change and 53% about wealth inequality, reflecting a generational shift towards entrepreneurship that blends profit with purpose, thereby necessitating a redefinition of business success and the meaning of profit in this ethically conscious digital age (Deloitte, 2023). Such findings underscore a generational shift in the conceptualisation of entrepreneurship, in which profit intertwines with impact and identity. Consequently, the meaning of profit has also been reconceptualised. Generation Z entrepreneurs no longer view profit solely in monetary terms but as part of a broader achievement spectrum encompassing purpose, fulfilment, and social contribution (Arkorful *et al.*, 2022; Lopes *et al.*, 2024). This reflects a paradigmatic shift in which success is measured by income and the perceived impact and meaning derived from entrepreneurial endeavours.

Existing scholarship on generational entrepreneurial tendencies predominantly examines differences in business motivations between Generation Z and their predecessors, such as Generation X and Millennials (Arkorful *et al.*, 2022; Lopes *et al.*, 2024; Saeedikiya *et al.*, 2024). While numerous studies highlight Generation Z's inclination towards socially responsible entrepreneurship and sustainability-driven business models (Ucuzoglu, 2020), a fundamental research gap persists in understanding how this cohort conceptualises profit within the broader framework of their entrepreneurial aspirations. Much of the existing discourse on entrepreneurial motivations remains descriptive, lacking a robust theoretical foundation to explain how Generation Z constructs the meaning of profit beyond its traditional economic function (Lopes *et al.*, 2024; Prakash & Arora, 2024). Furthermore, research on profit perceptions tends to be fragmented, often failing to explore the socio-cultural and psychological dimensions that shape these interpretations across different contexts (Lopes *et al.*, 2024; Sharma *et al.*, 2025).

We sought to address these deficiencies by critically examining the diverse meanings attributed to profit by Generation Z entrepreneurs. Specifically, we wanted to (a) investigate the multifaceted conceptualisation of profit beyond financial metrics, (b) analyse how these interpretations shape entrepreneurial motivations and decision-making processes, and (c) situate these findings within broader academic debates on intergenerational entrepreneurship and value-driven business practices. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on generational comparisons, we employed a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences and subjective meanings that Generation Z entrepreneurs associate with profit.

The striking methodological focus of this research was to apply a 'phenomenological' approach to the analysis of a deeply embedded economic construct such as profit. Classical economic literature often considers profit as a measurable indicator of business success, but understandings of it are always personal, shaped by one's experiences, culture, values, and socio-cultural context. The present investigation shows that Generation Z's conception of profit encompasses financial aspects along with aspirations about ethical business practices, social responsibility, and self-actualisation. Through an interpretive lens, we sought to understand how profit motivates individuals and shapes entrepreneurial intentions, thereby illustrating the complex balance between achieving monetary success and other non-financial goals.

Our research makes original contributions in two ways. First, it integrates conflicting theories of entrepreneurial motivation with the social value framework by holistically depicting profit as a construct comprising multidimensional financial, social, and psychological factors. Second, it builds on the literature on entrepreneurship by deepening our understanding of the reconciliation between the apparent contradictions of profit maximisation and the value-based business framework. Academically, policy-wise, and for business practitioners, the results offer value in designing policies, strategies, and curricula that focus on developing entrepreneurial traits that respond to the changing priorities of Generation Z.

This research liberates Generation Z entrepreneurs from the disparity and neglect of Global Z's entrepreneurship, which emphasises profits over social responsibility by illustrating the balancing act between surviving within the economic structure and addressing social considerations. It addresses the gap in the literature where financial profit is an outcome-based paradigm that dominates and overshadows the business purpose and entrepreneurial spirit as an achievement, social contribution, and self-actualisation. In addition to the neglected assignment of delineating what profit is today, this inquiry paves the way for guiding us through the innovation and evolutionary pathways Generation Z guides us through in the evolving social economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY DEVELOPMENT

Entrepreneurial Motivation and Achievement Need Theory

According to Lopes *et al.* (2024), business success depends mainly on entrepreneurial motivation. Aryoko *et al.* (2024) suggested that people with intense achievement must seek challenging tasks, risk dangerous ventures, and create ambitious targets. Entrepreneurship represents an enterprise that uses profit measurement techniques yet includes additional motives for its participants beyond monetary gain (Lopes *et al.*, 2024). Research indicates that Generation Z approaches profit differently than past generations have done. Generation Z pursues profit for business sustainability and seeks its financial value through tools that support social innovation and monetary goals (Saeedikiya *et al.*, 2024). Research widely accepts McClelland's theory in entrepreneurial motivation studies, but lacks evidence about Generation Z's understanding of profit operationalisation in their business activities. There is a need to investigate this theory with a specific focus on how it shapes Generation Z entrepreneurs who aim to achieve both economic gain and alternative motivational rewards. The inquiry aims to enhance comprehension of techniques for analysing Generation Z entrepreneurial motivation based on this theory. According to Lopes *et al.* (2024), entrepreneurial motivation relies on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. According to this thinking, Generation Z business people merge their pursuit of monetary gains with achieving personal growth. Generation Z prioritises business ventures because they need meaningful goals and societal benefits, unlike the vintage generations, who focus solely on financial gain (Deloitte, 2023; Saeedikiya *et al.*, 2024). Future investigation of integrated motivational drivers must focus on the entrepreneurial framework to achieve a complete understanding of current business trends.

Social Value Theory and Social Motivation in Entrepreneurship

Social Value Theory and Social Motivation Theory provide the fundamental understanding of social impact creation purposes for people and organisations, according to Chatterjee *et al.* (2021). According to Grilo and Moreira (2022), social entrepreneurship follows entrepreneurship theories because businesses need to achieve equal profitability and social value. According to the shared value theory, business effectiveness occurs precisely when social value reaches levels equivalent to marketplace value, as explained by Grilo and Moreira (2022). The B Corporations of Generation Z social entrepreneurs merge profit-making opportunities with social advantages in their business operations (Lazarte-Aguirre, 2024). The research field lacks comprehensive knowledge about Generation Z's methods of applying social values to their business selection process. Social value pursuit is an imperative entrepreneurial force while entrepreneurs face obstacles in merging financial sustainability with social impact requirements (Becker *et al.*, 2023). The research analyses the social motivation-backing bond between Generation Z enterprise strategies by studying their changing social needs across economic and cultural contexts. The motivating factors behind social entrepreneurship emerge from cultural aspects

and economic development stages; necessity drives startup ventures in developing countries, but developed nations focus on ethical change and social challenges (Amini Sedeh *et al.*, 2023). The study aims to evaluate Generation Z business owners regarding the influence that cultural shifts and new technologies have on their adoption of social value practices in their operations.

Profit Function Theory in the Context of Generation Z

According to traditional market principles, profit is the primary motivational factor (Narayanan, 2022). Nandi *et al.* (2022) added social elements and sustainability practices to the modern definition of profit. Research by Deloitte (2023) showed that Generation Z approaches profit in a way that defines it as both an outcome producing positive social change and a tool that enables social impact at its core. The framework of strategic profit demonstrates that economic sustainability development creates connections between financial profitability (Guandalini, 2022; Lopes *et al.*, 2024). Research on Generation Z's business operations, which lack social value integration, has failed to link their profit-making methods with the profit concept. We investigated how Generation Z understands profit and establishes a connection between profitability and sustainable social responsibility. Generation Z entrepreneurs show an extended profit conception through their venture activities by focusing on enduring value development rather than instant financial benefits, according to Hall (2022). This preference for ethical business operations indicates they are moving beyond previous economic thinking norms, prioritising only profit maximisation. The practical manifestations of Lopes *et al.* (2024) shared value concept remain insufficiently studied regarding Generation Z entrepreneurs. Knowing how the new generation applies profit function theory to make decisions will give us a deeper understanding of modern entrepreneurial approaches.

Gaps in the Literature and Research Justification

Various explanations exist in previous studies about entrepreneurial motivation and social value alongside profit function, yet researchers face important knowledge gaps. Research about Generation Z's entrepreneurial pursuits delivers mainly descriptive results without intensely studying their profit interpretation. Research lacks a detailed integration among McClelland's achievement need theory, social value theory, and the profit concept to explain the phenomenon. The present study shows weak relationships between its phenomenological research methods and existing literature. The study intends to resolve these gaps by creating an advanced systematic framework that provides analytical explanations. The scholarly works recognise digital transformation's impact on entrepreneurial behaviour (Gregori & Holzmann, 2020) yet fail to examine its precise effects on Generation Z's profit understanding. Researchers examine how new e-commerce and social media technologies affect profits and business sustainability among organisations managed by Generation Z.

Conclusion and Theoretical Implications

This research revealed that Generation Z possesses an unparalleled understanding of profit within entrepreneurship alongside monetary, social, and ethical frameworks. It contributes to the development of theory and practical application through the insights provided by applying McClelland's theory, social value theory, and strategic profit concepts. It works to advance knowledge of their psychosociological motives about digital and sustainable entrepreneurship. The findings set a foundation for further investigation concerning the entrepreneurial motivations of Gen Z. Further studies are needed alongside pending changes to economic conditions. It assists policymakers and educators in policy development, supporting Generation Z's psychosocial needs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We adopted a phenomenological approach to investigate how Generation Z entrepreneur-wannabes understand profit from their creative industry business ventures. Given the importance placed upon meaning and interpretation by participants, we used IPA, defined by Smith *et al.* (2021). It is based on Heideggerian and hermeneutic traditions and focuses on how people interpret their ex-

periences. According to Moustakas (1994), several phenomenological principles can be used to deepen interpretive analysis, such as intentionality, eidetic reduction, and noema-noesis correlation. Eidetic reduction helps bracket or set aside preconceived thoughts, whereas intentionality concerns consciousness and the experienced object. The noema-noesis lens enabled a thematic approach to how participants construct and deconstruct meaning around profit.

The data comprised four participants who considered themselves aspiring entrepreneurs from the creative industry, due to semi-structured interviews. We designed the interview protocol based on transcendental phenomenology theory to ensure alignment with research objectives. The main questions posed included: (1) How do you perceive the concept of profit in your business? (Exploring noema); (2) What has been your experience in achieving profit, and how do you interpret it? (Exploring noesis); (3) Do you consider profit as more than just financial gain? If so, in what way?; (4) How does the concept of profit influence your business strategy and long-term goals?; (5) How do you balance profit and social values in your business? We designed these questions to explore the meaning of profit more deeply from the participants' subjective perspectives, in line with the core principles of transcendental phenomenology.

This sample size aligns with the idiographic commitment of IPA with its emphasis on depth (Smith *et al.*, 2021). Despite the small sample, the selection of four participants was methodologically reasonable. Data saturation, or the point at which no new themes arise, was demonstrated to occur with as few as six interviews, particularly in more homogeneous samples (Guest *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, research conducted in this area, such as Mendoza *et al.* (2021), also utilised IPA alongside a limited number of participants in-depth and explored the former's identity and identity in youth populations (Shahzad *et al.*, 2024).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Field in the creative industry	Entrepreneurial stage
P1	Male	22	Graphic Design	Early-stage business owner
P2	Female	21	Fashion Design	Product development
P3	Female	23	Digital Content Creation	Pre-launch phase
P4	Male	22	Animation & Illustration	Freelance, exploring a startup

Note: All participants were undergraduate students and identified as members of Generation Z, aspiring to build businesses within the creative economy sector.

Source: own study.

We recruited participants through creative entrepreneurship networks. Inclusion criteria included being part of Generation Z (born 1996-2012), engaging in or planning a creative business, and being at various venture stages. We obtained informed consent and assured confidentiality. We used pseudonyms and stored data securely. Participants could withdraw without consequences.

We conducted the analysis within the structured framework of IPA, which is comprised of steps including reading and re-reading transcripts, initial noting, forward noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across themes, and moving to the next case before integrating patterns across cases (Smith *et al.*, 2021). Throughout this process, the researcher engaged in reflective journaling and bracketing to cope with bias and remain open to the phenomenon as the participants experienced it (Creswell, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research sheds light on the consumption patterns of Generation Z millennials and their profit-making tendencies as aspiring entrepreneurs. It revealed five interrelated themes constructed through open, axial, and selective coding within a phenomenological interpretative framework. Profit was re-conceptualised as financial gain and purposeful achievement driven by authenticity, personal values, and key influences. Respondents displayed a strong commitment to achieving mastery through failure, which aligned with their long-term goals, balanced profit with social responsibility, and ethical impact. The analysis incorporated thematic and phenomenological aspects of the analysis, as shown in Table 3, which depicts the development of the initial codes into broader themes.

Table 2. Analytical Process and Emergent Themes

IPA analytical step	Description	Emergent themes from analysis
Reading and re-reading	Immersion in transcripts to deeply understand participants' narratives and contexts	Initial insights into how profit is seen as <i>beyond money</i> and linked to personal fulfilment
Initial noting	Exploratory notes focusing on descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual observations	Identification of contrasts between <i>financial vs. non-financial motivations</i>
Developing emergent themes	Clustering interpretative notes into preliminary themes reflecting participants' perspectives	Flexibility and Autonomy as Key Entrepreneurial Drivers
		Financial vs. Non-Financial Profit: A Shift in Prioritisation
		Profit as a Motivational Factor vs. Ultimate Goal
		Balancing Profit and Social Impact: A Complex Dynamic
		Reconciling Theoretical Perspectives: A Multi-Framework Approach
Connecting themes	Establishing relationships among themes and organising them into superordinate structures	Thematic intersections reveal dynamic tensions in participants' entrepreneurial identities
Cross-case analysis	Comparing themes across all participants to uncover shared meanings and individual uniqueness	Recurring emphasis on <i>profit as value-laden</i> , not only numerical, and shaped by generational ethos

Source: own study.

Table 3. Coding Process and Thematic Framework Development

Selective coding (Core Theme)	Axial coding (Sub-theme)	Open coding (Initial code)	Illustrative quotations (Direct from Interview)		
Profit as Meaning	Redefinition of Profit	Profit is more than money	'Profit for me is when I feel personally satisfied, not necessarily when I make money.' (Respondent 2) 'It's not just financial gain; it's about happiness and fulfilment.' (Respondent 4)		
		Profit as inner satisfaction	'I feel I've gained when I can sleep peacefully knowing I did something meaningful.' (Respondent 1) 'Satisfaction is the real profit – money comes later.' (Respondent 3)		
		Profit as contribution to others	'If I help others, that's already a profit to me.' (Respondent 4) 'Impacting someone's life positively is more valuable than income.' (Respondent 2)		
		Entrepreneurial Meaning-Making	Social Orientation	Business should contribute positively	'It feels wrong to only chase money – my business should make a difference.' (Respondent 1) 'Success for me is when my work uplifts others.' (Respondent 3)
				Pursuing social values in business	'My business supports local artisans – that's the value I stand for.' (Respondent 2) 'I prioritise ethical products, even if they don't sell as fast.' (Respondent 4)
				Aspirational Goals	Desire to be impactful

Selective coding (Core Theme)	Axial coding (Sub-theme)	Open coding (Initial code)	Illustrative quotations (Direct from Interview)
Entrepreneurial Identity Formation	Personal Values	Following one’s passion	‘I turned down a corporate job to follow what I love.’ (Respondent 2) ‘Passion drives me more than any market opportunity.’ (Respondent 4)
		Staying true to oneself	‘Authenticity is key; I don’t want to compromise who I am.’ (Respondent 1) ‘I won’t run a business that doesn’t represent my values.’ (Respondent 3)
	Influence of Role Models	Inspiration from family or mentors	‘My father always said, ‘Do good and profit will follow’ – that stuck with me.’ (Respondent 1)
			‘My mentor showed me that business and kindness can co-exist.’ (Respondent 2)
Learning and Growth	Reflective Practice	Failure as part of learning	‘I’ve failed before, but I now see those as stepping stones.’ (Respondent 3) ‘Every mistake teaches me something new.’ (Respondent 4)
		Learning from direct experience	‘Theory is one thing, but I’ve learnt the most from doing.’ (Respondent 1) ‘I grow by facing real challenges, not just reading about them.’ (Respondent 2)
	Growth Mindset	Continuous improvement mindset	‘There’s always room to improve, no matter how far I’ve come.’ (Respondent 3) ‘I want to keep learning and evolving with the times.’ (Respondent 4)
Sustainability and Responsibility	Future Orientation	Seeing business as a life journey	‘This is a long-term commitment for me, not a quick scheme.’ (Respondent 1) ‘I view my business like raising a child – it needs time and care.’ (Respondent 2)
		Building for long-term impact	‘I want my brand to outlive me.’ (Respondent 4) ‘What’s the point of profit if it doesn’t build something meaningful for the future?’ (Respondent 3)

Source: own study.

The results from this research indicate that young prospective entrepreneurs consider profit not only monetary benefits but also moderate psychological benefits, as well as being aligned with their values. Respondents reported a strong preference for socially responsible ventures that practice ‘purpose over profit’ as entrepreneurial success, along with financial calmness, happiness, and meaningful contributions to society. Respondents also reported that entrepreneurship is a form of self-expression shaped by various role models and experiences, demonstrating the importance of authenticity and passion. They viewed challenges as opportunities, which depicts a bias towards holistic personal and professional development. Moreover, respondents highlighted the social dimension underpinned by an enduring moral responsibility to build socially responsible businesses within ethical entrepreneurship aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Discussion

This research shed light on Generation Z entrepreneurs’ perception of profit, which is far more advanced than simply thinking of profit from a monetary perspective. As respondents described, profit is not only a financial outcome but a construct integrated with values, social impact, and responsibility. This interpretation confirms and expands McClelland’s Achievement Motivation Theory (1961), specifically internal and external incentives. McClelland claims that people are motivated to master some skills personally (Abdullah *et al.*, 2025). However, our research indicates that Generation Z entrepreneurs integrate intrinsic aims (meaning, identity, social contribution) into achievement-focused extrinsic purposes. Such

hybrid motivation aligns with recent findings that younger entrepreneurs are increasingly driven by long-term value-based incentives instead of immediate results (Bui *et al.*, 2023). As participants narrated, 'profit as meaning' constructs a value-oriented, action-oriented approach to profit, which reverberates with the participants' understanding of traditional economic models. Moreover, such a shift in understanding is evident in (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022), which seems to assert that young entrepreneurs often prioritise impact over profit. This aligns with the broader understanding of 'psychological ownership' concerning a person's entrepreneurial activities, integrating elements of identity and moral obligation alongside economy-related choices (Dey & Fasbender, 2025). Moreover, this study reinforces Duncan-Horner *et al.* (2022) findings of purpose-driven entrepreneurs, stating that, in this case, personally socially embedded significance and the enduring change sought influence motivation.

Understanding profit as 'motivational confirmation' fits the hybrid theoretical approaches and corroborates the shared value theory premises (De Tommaso & Rodrigues, 2023). The participants' perception that profit is a proxy of the value they render to society motivates them to achieve goals that benefit their communities. Earlier, research by Abdulaziz-Alhumaidan and Khan (2024) showed that value-creation strategies tend to be formulated from the premise of blending ethical reasoning and business reasoning. This is more marked in Generation Z, whose economic behaviour stems from increased awareness about social issues, transparency on the internet, and advocacy for social issues (Ewe & Tjiptono, 2023). Moreover, participants in this study consider profit as a form of social verification of ethical entrepreneurship, where profit enables one to meaningfully contribute to social, environmental, and moral objectives. This finding affirms and extends the theoretical insights of Sadiq *et al.* (2021) on how hybrid entrepreneurs negotiate the opposing institutional logics of social good and financial return. Generation Z seems to breach this divide, viewing financial achievement and social contribution as synergistic rather than antagonistic – a view noted by Lopes *et al.* (2024) in their research on sustainable entrepreneurship.

This research contributes to the empirical research on the intersection between innovation and long-term entrepreneurial goals. It appears that participants strive for innovation that is not only technocentric but also ethical and ecological through the framework of sustainable innovation theory (Ghobakhloo *et al.*, 2021). Several respondents indicated that the aim is not economic domination but scaling solutions that provide resilience, circularity, and regenerative value. This interpretation corroborates Al Halbusi *et al.* (2024), who claim that sustainability-oriented innovation stems from an underlying entrepreneurial logic that prioritises deep care for the well-being of future generations and the planet. Moreover, respondents' acceptance of failure as a part of their entrepreneurial progression aligns with the entrepreneurial learning frameworks of Lattacher *et al.* (2024). These studies focus on the experience and the narratives around constructing an entrepreneurial identity, particularly how failure, reflection, feedback, and growth shape one's resilience and strategic foresight. In this study, Generation Z described failure not as a setback but as an essential component in self-improvement, indicating a movement toward 'reflective entrepreneurship' (Lattacher *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, role models were equally important to participants' development. This is consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), which emphasises the importance of learning through observing others, also known as social learning. More recently, Morrar *et al.* (2022) noted the significance of entrepreneurial role models on young entrepreneurs' motivation and identity formation, especially when such models demonstrated integrity, innovation, and positive social impact. This research supports these findings with the addition that Generation Z, unlike the rest of society, idolises leaders with actual moral and ethical values instead of those who achieved wealth and success. Ultimately, self-expression was cited as yet another way to narrate profit. From their perspective, entrepreneurs saw their business undertakings as living manifestations of their personal philosophies, identities, and ethical commitments. This finding reinforces Gregori *et al.* (2021) understanding of entrepreneurial identity as a fluid negotiation of one's internalised values and externally based social acknowledgement. It also connects with the recent discourse on 'identity-based entrepreneurship,' which suggests that community, mission, or professional identity, rather than self-serving monetary incentives, drives entrepreneurship.

Considering the study's findings, the view on entrepreneurial profit regarding Generation Z has shifted to focus on ethics, learning, and the value of longevity. This research applies McClelland's theory by adding moral aspects to fundamental intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, examines how financial success and social impact divide and dialogue through shared value theory, and adds identity and inter-generational dimensions to sustainable innovation theory. Generation Z is characterised as economically active, ethically focused, and futurological. This ascribes collectively to educators, policymakers, and incubators to create systems that foster ethical self-identity and identity as self-sustainability oriented, advanced education on ethical reasoning, sustainability, and identity self-concept. Such ecosystems enable today's youth to develop and nurture businesses that support social resilience and ecological sustainability, going beyond mere contribution to the GDP, in synergy with SDG 4 (education), SDG 8 (decent work), and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production).

CONCLUSIONS

The research examined how aspiring Generation Z entrepreneurs understand and conceptualise the profit of the creative economy. The study uncovered that profit is not only a financial gain but also redefined as a multidimensional construct that includes emotional fulfilment, purpose, social contribution, and alignment with personal values. This reframing captures a shift in entrepreneurial meaning-making, in which identity revolves around the archetypes of authenticity, sustainability, and long-term social impact. The research advances the discussion on entrepreneurial motivation and value creation by reframing the polar approach of intrinsic and extrinsic drivers towards profit. This Generation Z phenomenon illustrates the broader psychological and ethical context of entrepreneurship. The study was also methodologically innovative in using phenomenology to reveal the profound subjective experiences of developing entrepreneurship in the youth. In practice, the study results indicate that training and education in entrepreneurship require restructuring to better align with the expectations of this generation. The findings call for educators and programme developers to integrate ethics, social sustainability, and social innovations into entrepreneurial curricula. Policymakers should also promote business approaches that provide social value in addition to financial returns through funding, regulatory incentives, and capacity-building frameworks that support social entrepreneurship.

Noteworthy, this research has its limitations. The findings are not generalizable because of the use of qualitative methods and a small, homogeneous sample. The interpretive nature of the analysis also means the results are local, best understood as context-specific, and one should regard them primarily as explorative. Responding to these questions could further develop the understanding using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to test the emerging themes, longitudinally analyse different business life cycle stages, or examine values associated with entrepreneurship across varying cultures.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence

I hereby declare that the article is free from the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) or Generative AI (GAI) tools in its preparation, writing, analysis, and interpretation. All ideas, arguments, and writings are the result of the author's own work and critical engagement with relevant academic sources.

Conflict of Interest

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