Re-defining the Concepts of Generational Labelling Perspective from Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Generational theory states that people born at a similar time frame in history would experience similar political, social and economic realities thus will develop similar worldviews. The theory looks for significant historical events and identifies the impact these have on existing social order and value systems. Sometimes these events result in the dawning of a new era, and therefore of new generational cohorts (Cardington, 2011). Presently, there are four generations that are globally defined as identifiable generational cohort groups, namely Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generational Z. On a macroscopic view, individuals in different generations are diverse, they nevertheless share certain thoughts, values and behaviours because of the shared birth years and events; though considering Asia (especially in Malaysia context) the identifiable generations as commonly known may be misguided as life events varies across each country, Baby Boomers from the western nations has been referred to the booming of baby births during that period (O'Bannon, 2001), whereas in Malaysia for that time period it is impossible to observe a similar boom. This conceptual study attempts to re-define the generational labelling concepts by examining census data and socio-economic realities in order to re-define these concepts in light of the demographic reality in Malaysia. The authors of the study have formulated new labels and definitions that arise from facts that demonstrate that Malaysia has unique socio-economic challenges and opportunities.

Keywords: *Generational studies, generation labellings, baby boomer, Generation X, Generation Y, Generational Z*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understandably, every one of us acts and reacts to the world around us based on our own attitudes and values systems. Codrington (2011) stated that under the generational theory people who are born at a similar time in history would hence experience similar political, social and economic realities, be educated in similar systems with similar curricula, and influenced by similar popular culture, will develop similar worldviews. The theory looks for significant historical events in a country or region's history, and identifies the impact these have on existing social orders and value systems. Sometimes these events result in the dawning of a new era, and therefore of new generational cohorts. The universally identifiable generational cohort group, namely Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials) and Generational Z provide a broad outlines that can be useful in trying to encourage intergenerational understanding but these traits are, at best, generalizations. Generational theory was first popularized in the United States in 1960s and since them it has been picked up quickly by the media in much of the western world. The labeling tags have been widely accepted and used globally. However, these labels and their implications, based alone on the generally accepted generational categories in Western world, might not be completely applicable to all other parts of the world, such as in Malaysia. Present day concern in the Western world is the question of an ever increasing older population. This is a global phenomenon; however, there are regional variances in demographic transitions that must be considered.

The question the authors wish to explore in this study is the applicability of the concept of universally identifiable generational cohort group (such as "Baby Boomer") in the Asian context. The concept of Baby Boomers (and generation X, Y, and Z) is widely used in Asia and especially in Malaysia. The purpose here is to examine how well these concepts, as generally defined, fit into the socio-demographic context of Malaysia. As stated by Codrington (2011) important factors need to be taken into consideration and analyzed in order to get a clear understanding of these concepts in time and space. Amongst these are the historical period, political similarity, social and economic realities, education and popular culture. The authors contend there may be a need to re-define generation labels in light of the demographic reality as this reality brings about totally different socio-economic implications then the ones that are observed in the Western context. Thus it may well be necessary to give new labels and definitions to reflect the actual population distribution of Malaysia. In order to construct these new labels and definitions the authors have comparatively analyzed the population data between Malaysia and, for the most part, the United States. The United States was chosen as a reference point due to the origin of generational concepts and the extensive studies that have been done in the country on this subject.

2. THE ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT OF GENERATIONAL COHORT

To begin with, the term 'generation' brings with a variety of definitions and meanings. Portes and DeWind (2008) offer the term generation in reference to two distinct contexts. In a kinship context, the term generation can refer to a stage in a natural succession comprising those who are of the same genealogical of family ancestry, such as the generations of parents, grandchildren and so

on. The most widely popularized and accepted recent study in this area is the work by William Strauss and Neil Howe (1992), American sociologists whose work has laid the groundwork theory know as the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory (on Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069). Their theory of generation is based on two premises. The socialization hypothesis suggested that individual adult' values were formed during their childhood and the early teenage years and that these values stay relatively unchanged throughout their life. The second premise, the social constructivist theory, implies that reality is socially constructed by individuals and groups engaged in social interactions. The term 'generation' therefore defined as a group of people with a set of shared experiences that exhibit a shared worldview and continue to exhibit the characteristics of that worldview as they grow through life. The authors also identified that a generation tends to be about (approximately) 20 years apart that represent roughly the time from the birth of a group of people to the time they come of age and start having their own offspring. Parry and Urwin (2011) cited the early work of Strauss and Howe (1992) denoted that the standard approach across Western world (such as the USA, the UK and Australia) has been to assume that there are now four generations; know as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. The labeling is now widely used across the globe - if may not always be correctly understood. Table 1 details the birth year categorisations used in one of the most commonly cited source on the topic.

Table 1: Definition of generational cohorts currently (actively) engaged in the workforce/society

Generation	Year of birth	Also Known as
Baby Boomers	1943 – 1960 (~ 17 years apart)	
Generation X	1961 – 1981 (~ 20 years apart)	Baby Busters, 13th Generation
Generation Y	1982 – 2004 (~22 years apart)	Millennial, Net-Generation
Generation Z	2005 – up to date	Homeland, Pluralist
Source: Strauss and Howe Generational Theory (1992)		

The precise definition of these cohorts, in terms of year in which they were born, exhibits some variation between studies on this topic. However, in each case the grouping of individuals within these four generations is motivated by the belief that they each share different set of values and attitudes, as a result of shared events and experiences.

The following section presents a brief summary of the existing literature of the cohorts as they are classified by generations.

2.1 Baby Boomers
The phrase "baby boom" has been used since the late 19th century and refers' to a noticeable increase in the birth rate that happen after World War II in most of the western world. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first recorded use of the term "baby boomer", for a group who born between years 1946 to 1960, appeared in an article published in Washington Post in 1970. Hence, the labeled of baby boomer has since been a widely accepted term. However, various demographic experts have delimited the baby boom period differently. For instance, the United States Census Bureau considers a baby boomer to be someone born between 1946 to 1964 only; whereas Jones (1980) and Strauss and Howe (1992) both defined the span of the baby boomer generation as extending from 1943 through 1960.

In the western world Baby boomers make up the largest percentage of today's active workforce although some might have opted to retire early. Unlike their more traditionalist parent, Boomers grew up during much healthier economics times and have a more optimistic outlook on life as well as on work (Beek, 2011).

Codrington (2011) wrote that boomers are the post war generation who grew up during the time of grand visions such as drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll. The author notes that the 1960s and 70s were the turbulent time especially for young adult Boomers who went to university and rebelled against the GI and initiated the anti Vietnam War protest. These young adult Boomers were simultaneously being culturally and socially revolutionised partly due to the entertainment industry such as TV and Hollywood which contributed in providing a shared cultural experiences. In term of shared characteristics of the Boomers, shaped by the optimistic outlook and idealistic visions, they see job and career as an expression of self-interests and a path of fulfilment to finance their personal lives rather than just to get it by (Beek, 2011). McDonald (2008) added that generally the Boomers are ambitious, career-oriented and accustomed to intense competition for jobs and desire to remain connected to the workforce and make intellectual contributions as they near retirement age.

A number of qualitative studies have been conducted to provide in-depth analysis of generation cohorts. Gursoy, Maier and Chi (2008) examine the characteristics that defined each generation and found that the biggest differences were in their attitudes towards authority and their perceived importance of work in their lives. Their findings supported the common stereotypes that Baby Boomers lived to work and respected hierarchy and authority in the workplace and were resistant to change or learn new things

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2.2 Generation X

Generation X, commonly known as Gen X, the term was first use by a photographer by the name of Robert Capa in the early 1950s in a photo-essay about young men and women growing up immediately after the World War II. However, the conventional used of the term is said to have been popularized by the Canadian Novelist, Douglas Coupland, who wrote the novel Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture that actually caught the attention of people and began to use the (Wikipedia, 2013). In the United States, Generation X correlates with Thirteeners, which are the thirteenth generation under the American flag and constitutions. Some have coined it as the generation of "baby buster" because of the drop in the birth rate following the baby boom (Strutton, Pelton, and Ferrell, 1997; Martin and Prince, 2008). Defining Generation X is as complicated as categorizing the previous generations, as some studies are firm that Generation X ended with the Net generation, those born between 1978 and 1980 (Alch, 2000) while others insist that the generation continued into the 1980s (Strauss and Howe, 1992) or even from 1963 to 1984 (Codrington, 2011; Martin and Prince, 2008).

The unique social characteristics of Generation X are said to be cynicism, media savvy-ness, and pessimistic (Montana and Petit, 2008). It is also noted that this group is the first group to witnesses divorce of their parents, have a self satisfied sense of superiority and a strong addiction to caffeine (Tsui, 2001; Toronto Star, 2006). Codrington (2011) writes that this groups of cohort experienced an era of crises, from Watergate, Cold War and Vietnam War, to the energy crisis and collapse of communism plus terrorist's attacks. Other studies claimed Generation X to be the best-educated generation based on college and university enrolments and often positively correlated with computer usage (Mitchell, McLean and Turner, 2005). They are often credited with moving the Internet into the mainstream (Reisenwitz and Iyer, 2009). Empirical evidence on generational differences was carried out by Gursoy et al (2008), this group of researchers found that Generation X responded to instant gratification, worked to live and expected to be rewarded quickly for good work rather than waiting in line for promotions. They enjoyed flexible work hours and independence compare to their counterpart's generations. A study done by Kunreuther (2003) also found that Generation X is more concerned about work life balance than other generations.

2.3 Generation Y

Generation Y, also called Net generation or Millennium is the largest young adult and teen segment in the world. The phrase Generation Y was said to be coined in 1993 by an Advertising Age editorial section to describe the teens of the day, which is the generation to be born entirely in the twentieth century (Reed, 2007). This generation is defined as the generation growing up after the Cold War and in the new era of globalization, communication technology and wireless connectivity (Codrington, 2011). This generation is sometimes called Echo Boomers, due to the significant increase in birth rate

during 1980s to 1990s, especially in the United States. However, the birth rate tends to recline in favour of small families in twentieth century especially in developed western countries (Durkin, 2008; Reisenwitz and Iyer, 2009). Although the precise birth date for this generation are broadly debated, the broadly defined and accepted birth date for this generation are those born from 1980 to 2000, even as late as 2004 (Beek, 2011; Codrington, 2011). Although, McDonald (2008) noted that people born between 1979 to 1999 should be considered as the Y generation. Countries like Australia and other Western developed countries use 1983 as the initial period for the Y generations. The youngest members are still in middle school, while the oldest are in their late 20s or early 30s (Heaney, 2007).

This group has witnessed their parents lose their jobs after years of loyal services, as a result, they are more potentially apt to leave their careers after two or three years as compared the previous generation (Montana and Petit, 2008). They are living in an age of globalisation and unprecedented diversity and have the most exposure to other cultures than any other preceding generation (Codrington, 2011). They typically value autonomy and reinforcement in their jobs, as well as workplace that are designed to be more informal, fun and open. Because this generation grew up with technology such as personal computer, cell phones and other electronics devices, they tend to be highly proficient with technology (McDonald, 2008; Montana and Petit, 2008). Evans and Forbes (2006) coined this generation as "digital native" who are techno savvy. On the negative aspect, this generation have been characterised as being over stimulated and hooked on instant gratification and has also been accused of having a sense of entitlement and unreasonable expectations about work. Like their previous generation [Generation X], Generation Y professionals are more likely to put personal pursuits before career and very much desire flexible schedules that will help them achieve that balance (Beek, 2011; McDonald, 2008). Additionally, Durkin (2008) and Hira (2007) both noted that this generation is far less loyal to their employers than previous generations. They are lacking in fully engaging in their work and feel compel to leave one position for another to achieve their potential. Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins (2007) and Cennamo and Gardner (2008) used the Schwartz Values Survey to access differences in values between generations and their result supported the stereotypical view of generation Y as valuing autonomy and wanting a work-life balance.

2.4 Generation Z

Strauss and Howe (2007) in their groundwork theory, the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory, coined this group as the Homeland Generation. They had sponsored a web based contest for naming this next generation and the most nominated name crowned Generation Z as the Homeland Generation partly due to the event of September 11th, the attack on the World trade center in New York and other targets in the United States. Horovitz (2012) claims that the term actually is still in-the- running and other major media consultancy have recently stamped this

generation as a pluralist generation being that the United States is becoming an ethnically and socially diverse and pluralist society. Literature on this group is rather limited yet most use the term Generation Z for the cohort of people who are born from the early 2000s to the present day. Montana and Petit (2008) use the term Generation Z to refer to the to those who were born after 1996. The author also anticipate this group will be the most environmentally friendly as compared to their counterparts, they will also have an extremely high level of distrust and will be more apt to leave their career as quickly as Generation Y. Matthew (2008) stated that this generation [whose still have not yet to reach the teen years] will probably be the least physically active generation. Incredibly in tune with technology and innately eco-conscious, Generation Z will be content to travel the world virtually. Others anticipate that this group of cohort will be better educated than any other generation in history. Other prediction is that languages will be increasingly in demand, in particular Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. Politics will become less significant as this generation exercise power via their online identities rather than on the ballot box.

Considering that population there are difference in space and time the following section will attempt to recall historical events in Malaysia in order to understand the significant differences between the Western World and Malaysia.

3. BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE MALAYSIA HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From the 16th Century the Malaya Peninsula went through a period of foreign occupation. The Portuguese, the Dutch and the British all made attempts to gain control of this area. In 1511, a Portuguese fleet led by Alfonso de Albuquerque lured by the spice trade, had sailed into Malacca's harbor, opened fire with cannons, and captured the city from the locals. Later in 1786, the British acquired Penang Island and established a settlement called George Town. From the 1890s the British invested heavily in what was then called Malaya, developing transportation, tin mining and rubber plantations. The value of raw material exports, controlled by the British, in 1948, was in the area of 393 million USD. British interest in Malaya was economical, political and military and was a stronghold in the control of South East Asian (EH.net, 2010; Soong, 2011).

Britain ruled over Malaya until 1941 when the Japanese invaded Malaya and captured Singapore in early 1942. Japan occupied British Malaya and much of Asia until losing the war in 1945. An anti-colonial movement and a period of unrest, known as the Emergency, driven by a desire for self-determination, had been brewing since the late forty's and lasted for a period extending from 1948 and did not rest until 1960. The event of World War II and its aftermath brought the end of British rule. Peninsular Malaysia became an independent nation called Malaya in 1957; however, it is not until the early 1960, that the term "Malaysia" came into being after Singapore, Sabah, and

Sarawak joined Malaya in a federal union. Even after Independence the turmoil continued, the Chinese population were killed or send back to China, with those remaining forming a resistance army. It was feared by the western world that the resistance was motivated by communist interest both in Malaysia and from China (Soong, 2011).

Soong (2011) describes the state of the Malaysian economy, after independence as follows:

"…. the Malayan economy was largely unchanged from its colonial pattern …. an urbanized largely non-Malay west coast and a neglected Malay peasant economy along the east coast. Agriculture took up almost 50% of the GDP, and 60 per cent of the labor force, predominantly Malay, were concentrated in the agricultural sector" (p. 28)

The economy in Malaysia entered in a new era with advent of industrialization in the sixties (Soong, 2011). Although the First and Second Malayan Plans (1956 to 1965) stimulated economic growth for a short boom period it was later interrupted in May 1969 with ethic riots and political crisis. However, since the Asian economic crisis in 1997, Malaysia continues to grow in term of population and economy (Codrington, 2011; EH.net, 2010). While some western Countries like the USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, other parts of Europe were going through the Baby Boom era, Malaysia was struggling for its independence.

4. METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the pertinence of the accepted generational labels as defined in specific time frames (i.e. years of birth) to Malaysian society. The general applicability of these concepts may not fit in the social and demographic reality of a country like Malaysia. Taking these specific realities into account may imply the need to create new labels and definitions that are unique to the socio-economic time frames, challenges and opportunities proper to the Malaysian context.

In recent years many studies have been made in pursuit of solutions to the aging western societies (Henken & Schippers, 2012; Kurjak, Ana Stavljenic, & Stanojevic, 2012; Olshansky, Goldman, Zheng & Rowe, 2009). Virtually little has been done to explore how these labels and concepts can be applied to other societies. For societies that have not gone through the same population transition as western societies. Applying the same labeling to all societies might be misleading as population transitions in Western societies are not the same as in all parts of the world, especially in Malaysia and the rest of Asia.

A great deal of the literature on this issue focus on certain sets of attitudes and behaviors correlated with these labels and are used to define the generations (Cennamo &

Gardner, 2008; Kunreuther, 2003; Lyons, Duxbury & Higgins, 2007; Mitchell, McLean & Turner, 2005; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). This study, however, did not concern itself with the attitudes and behaviors. The central focus on this study is on socio-demographic variables on which these concepts rest. In this study, the authors attempt to explore the socio-demographic variables by employing a quantitative comparative approach on recorded data. The range of documentary data used in this study included a wide-range of quantitative evidence such as governmental statistics, public records and reports. In order to proceed with a comparative analysis the authors first established temporary cohort perimeters for this study using age groups most commonly used. However, for the sake of simplicity these parameters, when referring to the study group (in this case, Malaysia), are given different and simplified labels as presented in the Table 2 below.

Table 2: Age groups labels

Year of Birth	Study label (Malaysia)	Western labels (USA)
1943- 1960	Generation #1	Baby Boomers
1961 – 1981	Generation #2	Generation X
1982 – 2004	Generation #3	Generation Y
2005 – up-to-date	Generation #4	Generation Z

Codrington (2011) claims that people who are born in the similar time in history, experience similar political circumstances, share similar economic realities and education system will in some way bind to form cohorts of a similar era. The social constructivist theory, implies that reality is socially constructed by individuals and groups engaged in social interactions. The term 'generation' therefore defined as a group of people with a set of shared experiences that exhibit a shared worldview. Based on these assumptions specific factors are examined in order to determine how well the labels fit into the age parameters of Malaysians as compared to the USA. Available statistics and public records from the USA and Malaysia are used for these purposes. The reasoning behind selecting the USA, as the central point of comparison, is due to the origin of the concepts and that the broad scopes of studies carried out on generational labels are largely from the USA.

Historical factors and historical events are another significant data source for a study such as this one. In this study, historical evolution of the political entity is important in order to compare the two understudied countries. Since this study deals with population, it becomes necessary to examine four interdependent variables: (1) evolution of population growth, (2) fertility rates, (3) population ratios and (4) dependency ratios. The following are the definitions of the five other indicators (unit measurements) used for the purposes of analysis and comparison for this study.

Indicator # 1 Economic Realities: the level economic realities in term of the evolution of earnings and spending power. Other considerations that go along with this indicator are the types of employment and the state of urbanization in both Malaysia and the USA.

Indicator #2 Technology: the use of computers and internet access are assessed in order to measure the degree of evolution and the spread of technology. This has particular bearing when defining technological proficiency and the so called digital natives.

Indicator #3 Globalization: Although globalization may refer to many different things in a broad context, for the purpose of this study globalization is define as "the process of international integration arising from the interchange of world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture" (Globalisation, 2013). There may be many different alternatives to measure the intensity of globalization as experienced by a population. For the purpose of this study, it is estimated that the degree of connectivity with the outside world will suffice. As indicators of this variable, computer/ internet use and numbers of TV's per household was retained where these tools do provide ways of connecting, interacting and interchanging with the outside world.

Indicator #4 Economic developments: the definitions of the generation labels take into account the economic circumstances of the time. For the purpose of this study four indicators have been retained; degree of urbanization, sectors of employment, GDP and level of household consumption.

Indicator #5 Education: the evolution, in time, of the levels of education is an indicator that makes it possible to identify how well one cohort of one population fits into the characteristics defining the cohorts the other population. Besides, the education attainment is also an important factor in describing the generation labels and also in distinguishing between labels. The evolution of higher education will therefore be retained as a descriptive measure between the US and Malaysian populations.

5. STUDY ANALYSIS

### 5.1 World Population Growth
The growth of the world's population has been relatively slow prior to the 1950s. However, since 1950 there has been an unprecedented rise in population.

In a short period, from 1950 to 2000, the population has doubled from 2.5 billion to 5 billion according to Human Population website (n.d). The increase in population has been constant in all parts of the world. The growth of the population has occurred partly due to high fertility and a reduced mortality rate.

Referring to Figure 1, when the fertility rate of Malaysia and of the USA is compared, there seems to be

little difference in the trends that are taking place in either country. The fertility rate seems to going down in each country and appears to be approaching the same level.
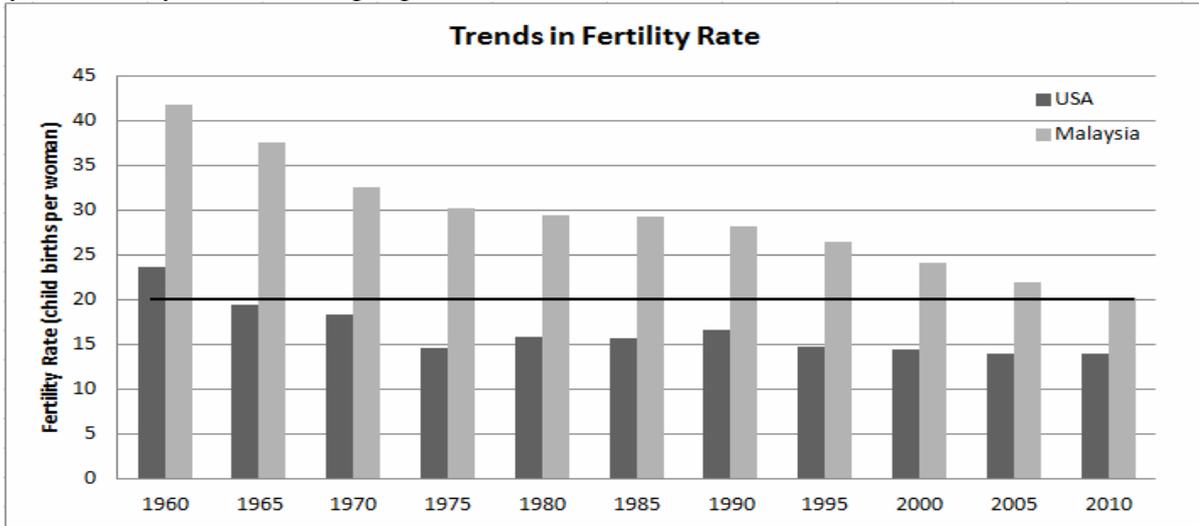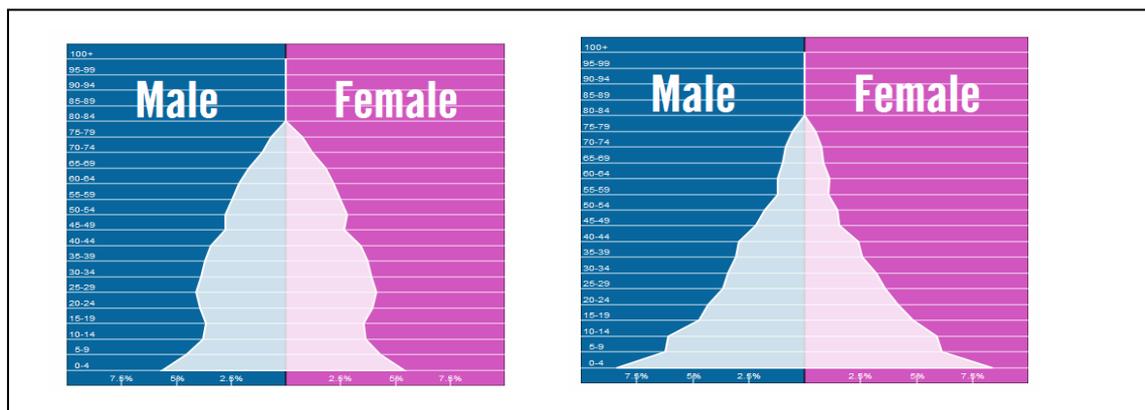

Source: Index Mundi – Country Fact, 2012

Fig 1: Trends in Fertility rate USA and Malaysia

From Figure 1 it may be observed that the fertility rate in Malaysia in 2010 is equal (at most similar) to the fertility rate of the USA between 1960 and 1965.

The peak in the United States birth rate happened after World War II. The birth rates had dropped significantly prior to 1946. From 1946 and 1966 there was a peak period in which the so called baby boomers where born after which there was a new declined in birth rates.

Unfortunately, the statistics for the same period for Malaysia are not readily available. Referring back to the earlier section of this paper, in the brief introduction to Malaysia historical context, it was noted that the historical

event during the period when baby boomers where born in the United States, that in fact, Malaysia was going through a different transition period. Malaysia was in the process of becoming an independent state. Some of the available data does give a good indication of the population trend, in Malaysia, during the same time period. The following Population Pyramids (as show in Figure 2) does make it possible to make certain observations in regards to the age distribution of the population in Malaysia as compared to the United States.

Malaysia   United States

Source: Population Pyramids, n.d

**Fig 2:** Population pyramids for Malaysian and the United states in 1950

In 1950, the population of the United States, between the ages of 10 and 20 is smaller than the previous age group (20 – 29 age groups) and also smaller then the next age group between the ages of 0 and 9. That period

correspond to the start of the baby boom period. When examining the Malaysian age distribution for the same period, it is evident that the growth has been continuous. It is possible to infer that there has been no decline in births

for a certain period which was followed by a new boom as is the case for the United States.

both countries. It is evident from these pyramids that the birth rate in the USA was already in a phase of decline in 1965 while in Malaysia the birth rates continued to increase.
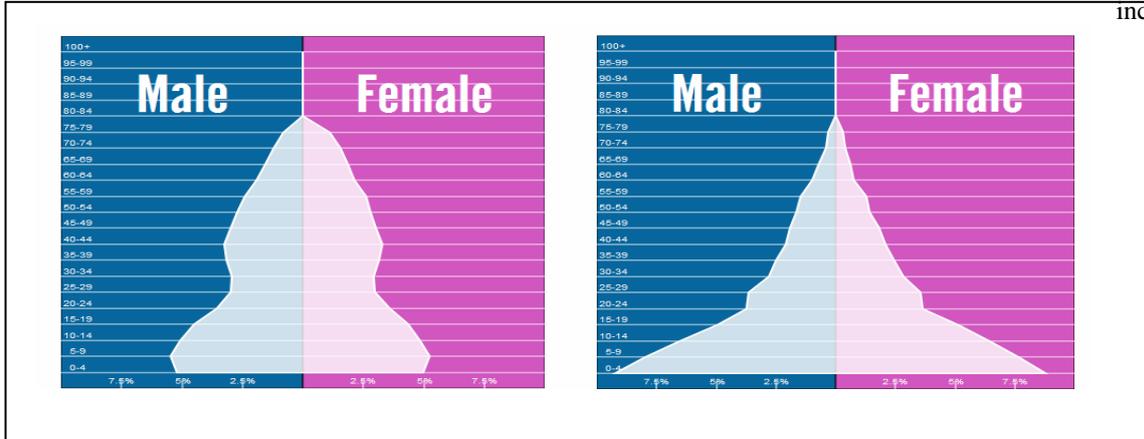
It is thus also possible to imply that the term "baby boom" cannot have the same implication and significance in both populations. The Population Pyramids, presented in Figure 3, for the period up to 1965, is also evidence of the distinctions that has to be made between

United States   Malaysia

Source: Population Pyramids, n.d

Fig 3: Population pyramids USA and Malaysia in 1965

5.2 Demographic Transition

Demographic transition theory "refers to the transition from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates as a country develops from a pre-industrial to an industrialized economic system" (Demographic

transition, n.d.). The process is also accompanied by urbanisation, industrialisation and the rise in income (Chesnais, 2011). This process eventually leads to a stable population growth. The process usually follows four states as presented in Figure 4.
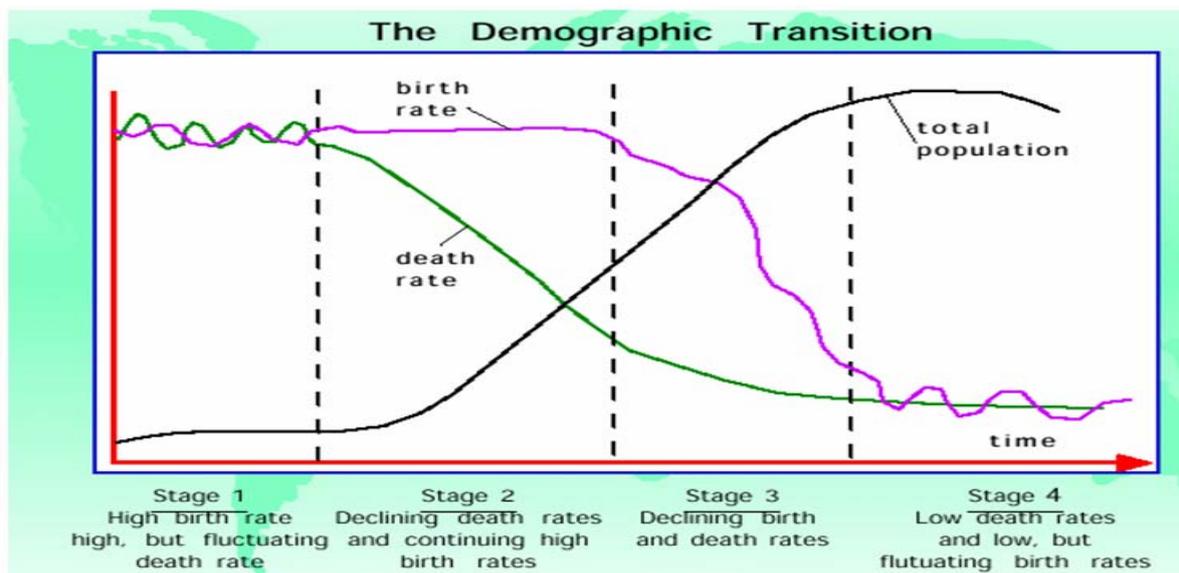

Source: Human Populations, n.d

Fig 4: Demographic Transition Theory

There is therefore a transition that takes place from Stage 1 to Stage 4. According to the theory, in Stage two there is a decline in death rates that is also

accompanied by a continued high birth rate. By applying the theory to both countries context, the data for Malaysia

indicates that (between 1960 and 2012) there has been a steady decline in death rates. There has also been a constant, but low, decline in birth rates as show in Figure 5.
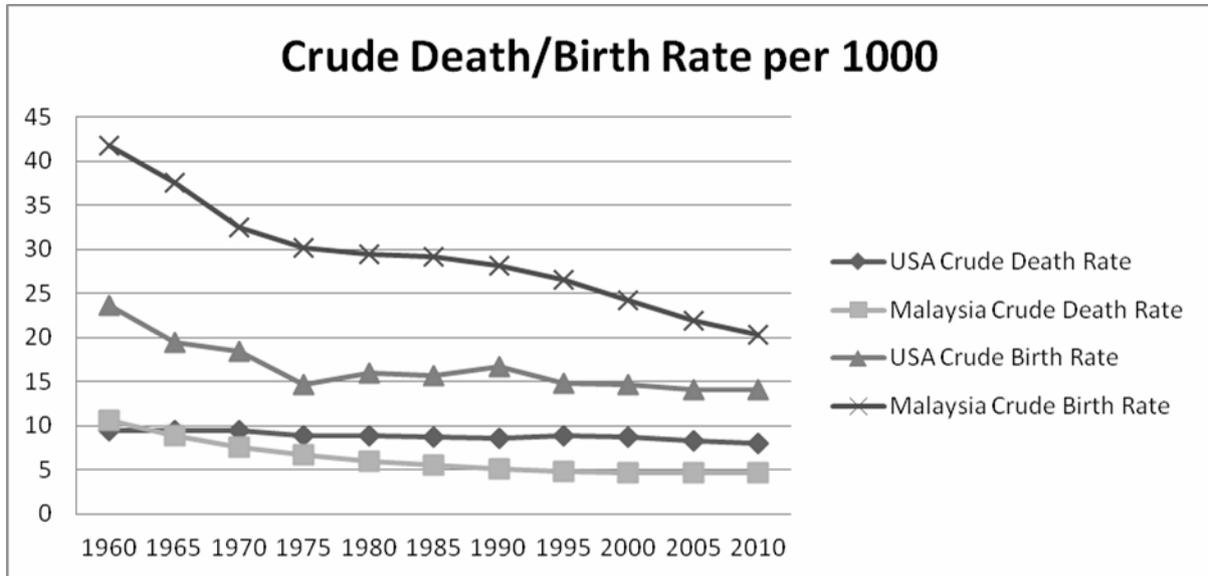
Source: (Index Mundi - Country Facts, 2013)

Fig 5: Malaysia Birth and Death rated 1960-2012

The same data for the United States; however, shows a different situation. Both the birth rate and the death rate have stabilised since the late 1960's. The birth rate in Malaysia in 2010 falls between the same birth rate experienced in the USA in the mid 60's.

5.3 Baby Boomers or Generation #1

Compared to the United States, the birth rate in Malaysia remains relatively high. In line with the Demographic Transition Theory, Malaysia appears to be in the first part of the Stage 3 while the United States is well into Stage 4. The population distributions in both of these countries have definitive consequences when the dependency ratios for both countries are examined. According to published international statistic, the dependency ratio may be defined as the number of people of working age (between 16 and 64) as compared to the number of non-working people (0-14 and over 65) age.

In 2011, the dependency ratio in the United States was recorded at 50 and the dependency ratio in Malaysia was recorded at 53. The ratios for each country are relatively the same. The difference is however in the nature of the dependency. Table 3 presents the old and young dependency ratio for the United States and Malaysia.

Table 3: Comparison of young and old dependency ratios for the United States and Malaysia

Country (Year 2011)	Dependency Ratio	Dependency Ratio Old	Dependency Ratio Young
United States	50	20	30
Malaysia	53	8	46

Source: World Databank, 2013

In the United States, there is a slightly more balanced dependency distribution between young (30) and old (20). The dependency ratio in Malaysia is clearly a younger population then than of the United States. Tracing back the at the end of the Baby boom in 1966, the young decency rate in the United States, at 50, as shown on the Figure 6, was almost equal (at least as large as) to the present young dependency rate of Malaysia.

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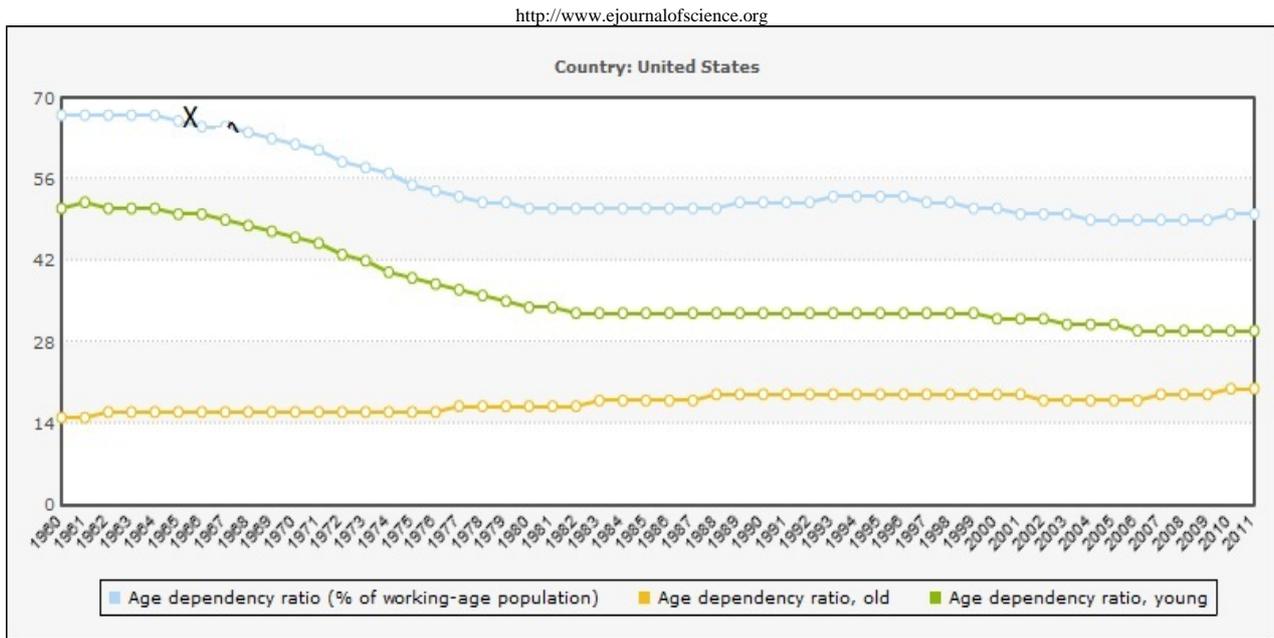
Source: World Databank, 2013

Fig 6: Young and Old Population Ratios USA

Based on present day population growth estimations, Malaysia will not experience the same young / old dependency as is presently observed in the United States. As demonstrated by Figure 7, the forecasted population for Malaysia is a more evenly distributed young / old population ratio by the year 2055. An old dependency ratio, as the one presently being experienced, in the United States is unlikely to occur in Malaysia. These observations compiled with the population distribution of 1950 and 1965 are evidence that it is impossible to speak of a baby boom period, in Malaysia, similar the one experienced in the western world between 1946 and 1966.

Source: Population Pyramids, n.d.

Fig 7: Estimated population distribution, Malaysia 2055

Therefore, the rational for the application of the concept of "Baby Boomers", in terms of a burst in
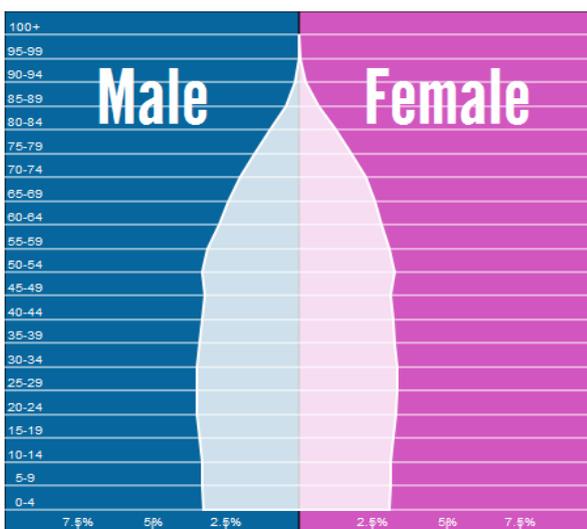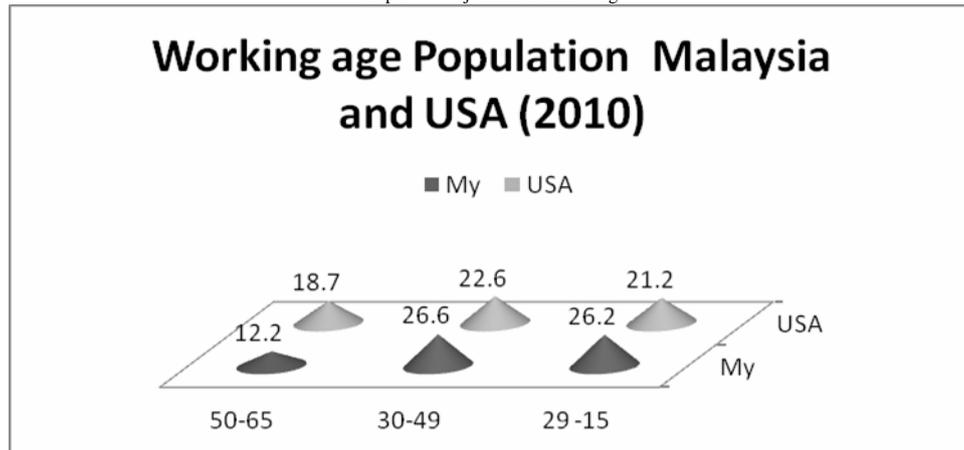
population, during the period between 1946 and 1966, in Malaysian society, does not fit. The nature of the dependency ratios (young / old) also alters the allocation of resources and the determination of services needed to be put in place by a society (Bloom, Canning, & Servilla, 2001).

Baby boomers are said to have been born in a period of much healtier economy then the previous generation. This was a time of economic expansion in the United States.

Beginning in the 1950s, America's economy experienced an unprecedented level of growth that lasted until the early 1970s. Though the United States' population was only six percent of the world's population, Americans controlled more than 40 percent of the world's wealth. (Aboukhadijeh, 2012)

The population of the same age group in Malaysia was born during a time of economic dominance by the British, accompanied by a struggle for independence.

The Baby boomers had the luxury of a University education which is something, as will be seen later, that only became available in Malaysia to cohorts born later. The proportion of the working age poplulation in Malaysia is younger than in the USA as can be observed in Figure 8. The significant difference between these two countries is that Malaysian workforce is not as strongly dominated by older population as oppose to the USA. Nor is the important question of workforce replacment as critical in Malysia as Malaysia has a reserve of young people who are entering the work force

Source: Population Pyramids, 2012

Fig 8: Comparison between working age population (Malaysia and USA)

The baby boomers were also brought up with TV, more then 50 million sets in the ealy 60's (Aboukhadijeh, 2012; Beek, 2011; Codrington, 2011; McDonald, 2008). Many in their youth, travelled Europe with a copy of Frommers, Europe Under $5 a Day (Aboukhadijeh, 2012). Contrary, to the USA, the population of this same age group, in Malaysia, was puting together the foundations of a new nation. The above mentioned concepts are futhrer explored in the following section.

5.4 Generation X, Y and Z or Generation #2, #3 and #4

Having established the difficulty in the application of the commonly accepted concept of Baby boomers to Malaysia society, it is now possible to examine other indicators that have also shaped the X, Y, and Z generations. The Baby boomers were brought up with Television. Generation X and those who followed were born with TV and Generation X saw the arrival of satellite TV (Satelite Television, 2013). The fact is that Television broadcasting was not introduced in Malaysia until the late 1963 and only in 1996 did Malaysia have its first satelite nextwork (Wikipedia, 2012). Table 4 presents a comparitive estimate of how widespread TV was in both of these contries over the period of 1975 to 2002 (according to the availabity of statistics and recorded data).

Table 4: Television sets per Household

Year	USA %	Malaysia %
1975	97	20.4
1980	98.6	44.69
1985	99.4	60.16
1990	101	64
1996	97	76.9
2000	96.8	82.4
2002	97.8	88.91

Source: Nation Mater, n.d

This table gives a good indication of the degree of TV penetration in Malaysian society. While the Baby boomers (1943-1960) where being brought up with TV, the people in Malaysia of this same age group, who are labelled as Generation # 1, who where between the ages of 15 and 32 yrs old, where getting introduced to TV as only 20.4% of the homes have TVs. It is only in the late 80's Generation # 3 (during the period corresponding to Generation Y) that TV's become a common household item in Malaysia. That was eventually followed, in 1996, with the possibility for Malaysians to connect to Satellite TV. In fact, Generation 3 became potentially able to be globalizes, through TV, as was Generation X. There is therefore an offset of one generation. Generation # 4, corresponding to Generation Z, will most likely have the same advantages in this area as did earlier generation in the USA.

Generation X is characterised as having moved Internet into the mainstream (Reisenwitz and Iyer, 2009). Generation Y, the digital Natives, is characterised as the Net Generation who grew up with technology such as personal computers and electronic devices and tends to be highly proficient with technology (Evans and Forbes, 2006; McDonald, 2008; Montana and Petit, 2008). Paynter and Lim (2001) state that the year 1995 is considered the beginning of the Internet age in Malaysia. They further stated that according to census data during the year 1996 only one out of every thousand Malaysian had access to internet; this grew to 2.6% of the population by 1998.

Taking the same conceptual points for further analysis, if Internet has become available in Malaysia in 1995 this means that Generation X had reached the ages between 14 and 34, during that same year. At that point in history, the number of computers ownership per capita in the USA was 324 whereas in Malaysia the per capita ownership of computers was only 29 (refer to Table 5). However, it is not until 2005, that computer ownership in Malaysia begins to approach the 1990 level of the USA. Therefore, the role played by Generation X would be more attributable to Generation # 3 in Malaysia (corresponding to Generation Y). It is only during Generation # 3 that

Malaysians start to become as well connected to the outside world, through the use of internet, as was the previous Generation X in the USA.

Table 5: Number of Computers per capita USA/Malaysia

	2005	2000	1995	1990	1985
USA	762.1	570.4	324	217.1	106.2
Malaysia	193.3	95.6	29.9	8.4	n/a

Source: Nation Master, n.d

Table 6 also reveals similar information demostrating that personal Internet connectivity in Malaysia grew at a much slower rate and at a later time then it did in the USA.

Table 6: Broadband Scribers per 1000

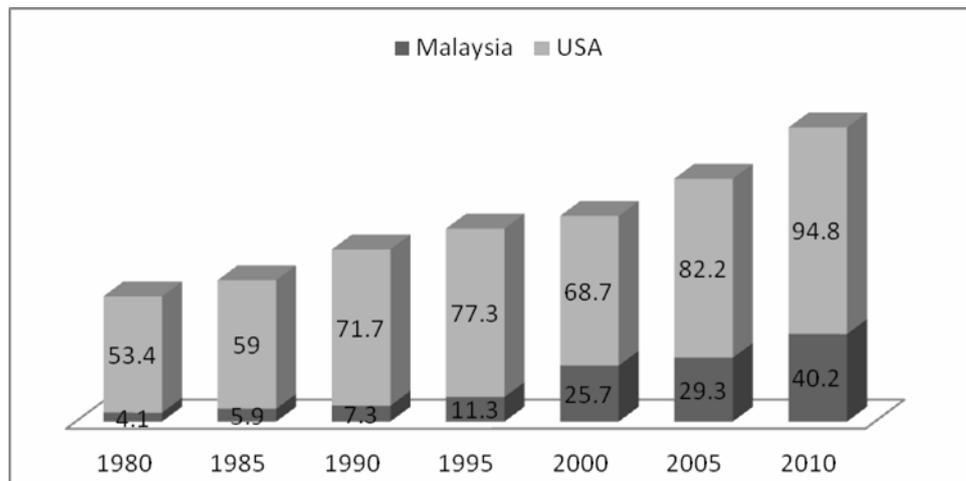|	USA	Malaysia
2005	166.63	19.35
2004	129	10.15
2003	97	4.5
2002	69	.8
2001	84	.17
2000	25	n/a

Source: Nation Master, n.d

Even thought the same data, as the one used for Table 5 and Table 6, was not available to make any comparive analysis to determine the availabity of Internet connectivity in examining Generation Z the information that is availabe, as presented in Table 7, does provided indication that Generation # 4 in Malaysia will more then likely be as well connected as Generation Z in the USA.

Table 7: Numbers of Users That Access the Internet* /Per Capita

	USA	Malaysia
2007	695	629
2005	692	434
2003	n.a.	355
2002	551	237

Source: Nation Master, n.d

The Baby boomer generation is said to have been the first one to enjoy a widespread degree of Higher education (Chen and Choi, 2008; Codrington, 2011; Morshidi, 2005). Figure 9 presents comparative data in Tertiary enrolment between the USA and Malaysia from 1960 to 2010.
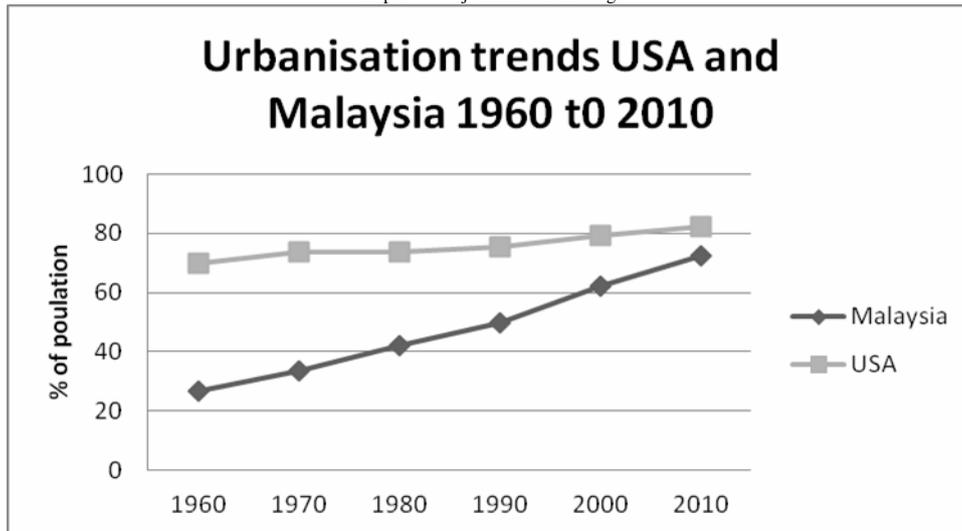

Source: Index Mundi – Country Fact, 2012

Fig 9: Comparative Tertiary Enrolment USA/ Malaysia 1960-2010

The average age of university enrolment, in Malaysia, as stated by Morshidi (2005), is between the ages of 17 and 23. Taking this age group as a guideline, these students would be born between 1990 and 1996. This age group fits into the broader age group of Generation Y, or Malaysia Generation # 3 (those born between 1982 and 2004). The data contained in Figure 9 ilustrates that the Malaysian Generation #4, with an enrollments of 40.2, is starting to catch up with the early 80's university enrollment level of the Baby boomers in the USA (53.4).

Urbanisation is a process whereby rural populations leave their small town an villages to move to the Urban areas of the country either for better opportunity or education. One of the consequences of urbanisation is a shift in labour force For the most part, there is a shift from agricultural labour to the non-agricultural sectors of the economy (Liu, Chen, & Guojie, 2004).

Figure 10 present the urbanisations trends that happened in the USA and Malaysia in the period between 1960 and 2010.

Source: Index Mundi – Country Fact, 2012

Fig 10: Urbanisations trends in the USA and Malaysia from the period 1960 to 2010.

Since the 1960's, Malaysia has experienced a progressive transition towards becoming a more urbanized society. However, during the Baby boom period and up to larger part of 1960, Malaysia was still largely a rural society as compared to the USA. As indicated by Figure 10, Malaysia reached the same level of urbanization that existed in the USA during the 60's at a later period between 2005 and 2010. This provides an indication that while the Baby Boomers in the USA where growing up as urbanites, the same age group, Generation # 1, in Malaysia, were more predominately in rural settings. The urbanization phenomena being more intensively experienced in Malaysia happens at later a periods; corresponding to Generation # 3 and Generation # 4.

These same phenomena are also reflected in the employment structure as show in Figure 11.

Source: Converted data source obtained through Index Mundi – Country Fact, 2012

Fig 11: Employment by Sector in the USA and Malaysia from the period 1980 to 2010.

It is evident from Figure 11 that the structure of employment in Malaysia is actualy changing. In the last 30 years, the rate of employment in agriculture has been going down progressively. On contrary, the rate of employment in the industrial and service sectors has been on the rise. By 2010, the services and industry sectors have made up a large partion of the job market avilable in Malaysia. However, the same disparity, as the one observed in the USA, does not show the similar picture, where over 80% of the jobs are in services and very few in the agricultural sector. The USA econony has progressed from an agricultrual-based economy to an industrial-based economy and the service-driven economy at a much earlier time period than in Malaysia.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, by the year 1965 the percentage of employment in the

agricultural sector was 3.9% and manufacturing was at 31.5% (Office of Trade and Industry Information, 2010). The first clear observation that comes from this is that employment during the Baby boom era in the USA is significantly different than the conditions that existed, at the same time, for Generation # 1 in Malyasia. The conditions boths these groups grew up in were very different and the following generations also experienced different realities.

respective settings, two indicators are compared: GDP per capita and Household consumption.
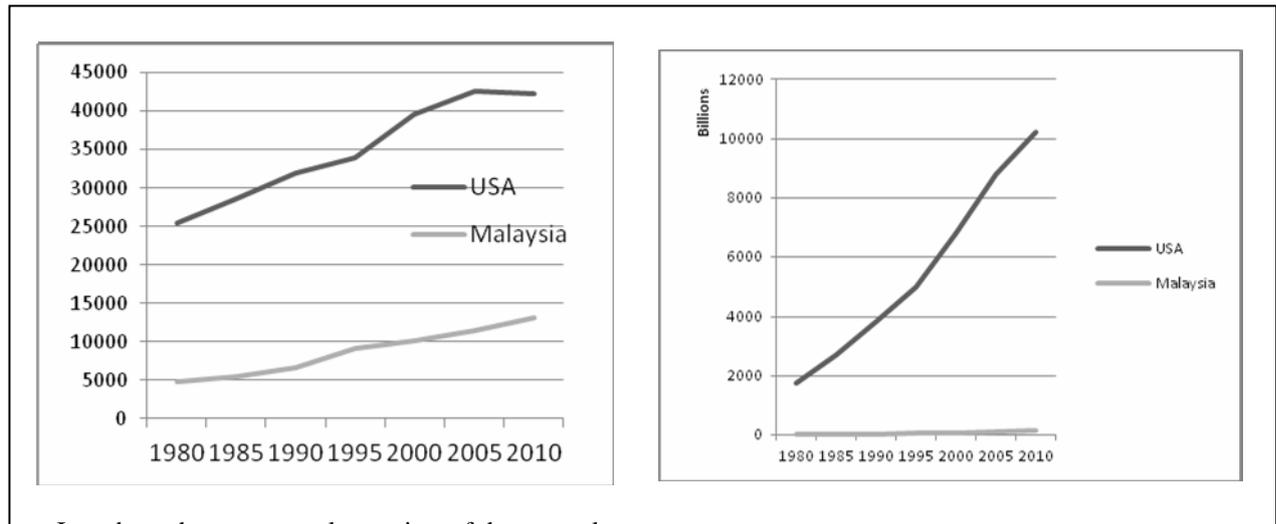
In order to have a general overview of the general economic well-being of each of the generations in their
GDP per capita
Source: Index Mundi – Country Fact, 2012

Household consumption

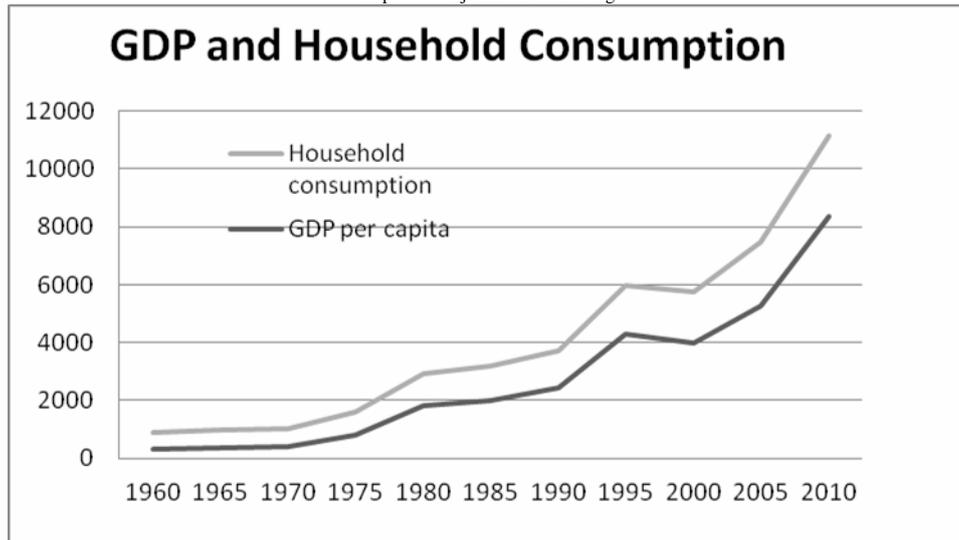**Fig 12:** Household consumption and GDP per capita in the USA and Malaysia

As shown in Figure 12, the household consumption in the USA has constantly been significantly higher than in Malaysia. By the 1980, there already existed a wide discrepancy between these two countries. This discrepancy has not ceased to widen up to 2010. The same observations can be made when examining the GDP per capita. There is no way of avoiding the debate that quality of life cannot always be measured in terms of economy. Figure 12 does, nonetheless, present a certain image of potential economic well-being and the equal accessibility of equal goods and services. None of the Malaysian' generations have, as yet, experienced the same economic well being as their USA counterparts.

The evolution of consumption does ".... allows an assessment of purchases made by households, reflecting changes in wages and other incomes, but also in employment and in savings behavior" (Household consumption expenditure, 2011). When examined in the context of globalization, the comparison between these two countries seems more critical

Generation # 1 was challenged by economic circumstances not like the ones of the Baby boomers in the USA. In light of these two economic indicators, Household consumption and GDP per capita, will Generation # 4 have the similar challenges and opportunities, unlike those of

Generation Z, in general and as well as in participating in a globalised world? This is still unknown territory. Yet, when examined in the context of its own evolution and development, Figure 13, Malaysia has actually experienced continuous growth. Between 1960 and 1990 there has been a continuous growth in GDP and a continuous increase in household consumption. Growth in GDP and in consumption has more the doubled in the last ten year, from 1990 to 2010.

The children being born in 2010 will experience socio-economic realities unknown to those born during the years of struggle for independence; the era usually referred to as the Baby boom era.

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GDP and Household Consumption

Source: Converted data source obtained through Index Mundi – Country Fact, 2012

Fig 13: Household consumption and GDP per capita in Malaysia

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The analysis of the data pertaining to the indicators chosen demonstrates that the application of the generation labels, as used in the western countries, such as in the USA in this particular case, is unrealistic and is not truly representative labels for a country like Malaysia. Population growth, population ratios and young and old dependency ratios have show radical differences in both nations' populations. A population "boom" did not really take place in Malaysia in the same sense as it did in the USA (or other part of the western world).

On the other hand, Malaysia has experienced a continuous growth in population from the beginning of the 1950's. This growth had produced a large young population, with a young dependency ratio, unlike the one presently being experienced in the western world. As Malaysia goes through the cycles of demographic transition, and well into the 2050's, the population growth will stabilized. However, the population growth projections do not forecast an old dependency ratio similar to the one of the western world. A more balanced population distribution should take place (refer to Figure 7).

When examining the pertinence of indicators relevant to the Generations X, Y, and Z labels, it became evident that it was difficult to compare the realities of the generations in both countries. For the most part, there is an offset of at least one generation and in some cases two generations. This was particularly evident when examining certain determining factors like TV, Internet and Computer access. The same observations are also evident when looking at each countries education, urbanization and economic evolution. This lag between the USA and Malaysia is also reflected in the evolution in the job market and employment by economic sectors. The western world is at odds, for the large part, with an aging

population (Henken & Schippers, 2012; Kurjak, Ana Stavljenic, & Stanojevic, 2012; Olshansky, Goldman, Zheng & Rowe, 2009). The problem arises with the need to replace the aging workforce. Contrarily, Malaysia has reached unprecedented economic growth and has a young population preparing to enter the workforce and into the market place. This young population will be more highly educated then the proceeding Malaysian generations (their grandparent or parents). They will be better "connected" to the world and will most likely be more aware of the competitiveness of a globalised word.

For generational labeling to have contextual meaning, the comparison between Malaysian generations may be more relevant than the comparisons made between generations of both countries. The descriptors and terms used to define the western generations are defined between generations not between countries. This type of comparison, between generations, is what gives the western labels their pertinence and meaning historically and socially. The following table (Table 8) is an attempt to provide new labels that reflect the past, the present and the future conditions in Malaysia using markers that the authors suggest represent the true reality of Malaysian' generational labels.

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Table 8: Malaysian Generational Labels

Year of Birth	Events	Labels
1943 – 1960	1. A period of conflict, struggle and seeking for Independence. 2. Formation of the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malays Union or KMM): the first nationalist political organization in British Malaya fighting for Malay rights and against British Imperialism (History of Malaysia, 2013). 3. The Emergency 1947 – 1960 (Soong, 2011). 4. World War II, Occupation by Japan. 5. Achieved Independence in 1957. 6. First Malayan Plan (1956-1960) was developed and was the first economic development plan launched by the Malayan government allocating resources to agriculture and rural development (First Malayan Five-Year Plan, 2011).	Study label Generation # 1 The Seekers
1961 - 1981	1. Developments in education. 2. New Economic Policy (1971) aimed at economic restructuring. 3. Beginning of industrialization in better of the country. 4. Process of urbanization begin.	Study label Generation # 2 The Builders
1982 - 2004	1. Unprecedented access to higher education. 2. TV/ Internet. 3. Urbanization/towards modernization (vision 2020). 4. Transformation in employment (from agricultural to industry to services). 5. Peak of Capital formation such as land improvements (fences, ditches, drains, and so on); plant, machinery, and equipment purchases; and the construction of roads, railways, and the like, including schools, offices, hospitals, private residential dwellings, and commercial and industrial buildings 6. Economic growth, income and consumption. 7. High employment opportunities.	Study label Generation # 3 The Developers
2005 onwards	1. Most educated and urbanized. 2. Exploit/travel to the world 3. Growing opportunities in the service sectors. 4. Higher income / higher consumption. 5. Advance development in Internet and communications technologies. 6. Population will start to balance out; more intense competition for jobs.	Study label Generation # 4 The N-Generations (N stands for New)

7. CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

This paper has provided a critical analysis of the concept of generational labeling or, more specifically, re-defining the concepts of generational labeling taking it from a Malaysia perspective. Though the labeling tags are used widely and adopted globally, as well as in the management practitioner literature, simply based alone on the generally accepted generational categories in western world might not tell the complete picture of other parts of the world, especially in Malaysia. In order to understand the implications of the notion of 'generations" it may be more logical to study generational cohorts in their proper and unique context, reflecting their own realities, rather than taking it directly from the totally different socio-economic implications in the western world. In the present day, in most part of the western world, there is the question of an ever-increasing older population and lower birth rate.

This is a global phenomenon; however, there are regional variances in demographic transitions that must be considered and generalised populations theories may need to take account of these variances.

The redefined generation labels suggested by the authors are open and for the large part still in preliminary conceptual stages. They are not fixed but are rather the authors' attempt to place generational cohorts in time frames that reflect the evolution that is unique to Malaysia. They were put together in an attempt to create dialogue and establish the legitimate variables to define the intergenerational differences that are important social categorisations in defining Malaysia. This refining provided a better clarity of the true portrait of Malaysian's generations that are in the (will be) workforce. They also provide a more realistic understanding as to how these new defined generations changed through the decades. The impact of these changes would warrant further empirical validation, perhaps for future study.

Parry and Urwin (2011) noted that enterprise managers may see little gain from a rigorous dissection of the extent to which any observed differences in work values are due to cohort or generation effects, in particularly, if they are focusing on short-term planning rather than the long-term picture. Alternatively, enterprise managers will be more effective if they understand factors that influence their employees' attitudes and being aware of the influences of one's own generational outlook is perhaps crucial to reduce conflicts or clashes.

The authors may have a theoretical basis for re-defining the notion of generational labels in the Malaysia context, but currently there is little empirical evidence for the assertion that these new labels, within their specified age groups, may also be defined by their own specific values and attitudes. The authors contend that the realities that are reflected in the redefined Malaysian generational labels will also determine values and attitudes that cannot be unquestionably attributed to the same generational cohorts based on observation made in the western world. This in itself has determining implications in understanding and managing population cohorts. Any policy maker, marketing agent, HR manager or industry that fails to recognize these trends in population will have difficulty in allocating the proper resources to the proper sectors of society.

The proposed theoretical framework is the beginning stage for further investigation and fine-tuning. Future academic research should continue to work on empirical validation that focuses on values and attitudes that may result when dealing with cross generational behaviours. In line with Cardington's' view and the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory further research may need to be done in relation to generational labels that are valid and relevant to shared historical and socio-economic context, time and place.

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