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Employee Experience and Job Performance of Generation Z: Evidence from Digital Startups in Vietnam

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Abstract: In the context of digital transformation reshaping organizational operations and human resource management, Employee Experience (EX) has emerged as a critical driver of job performance and talent retention—particularly among Generation Z, a tech-savvy and value-driven workforce. This study investigates the relationship between EX and job performance (JP) among Gen Z employees working in digital startups in Vietnam. Drawing on an integrated theoretical framework combining Jacob Morgan's EX model (2017), Kahn's employee engagement theory (1990), and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, the research employs a quantitative approach based on survey data from 210 Gen Z employees across various digital startups. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis reveals that EX significantly influences JP both directly and indirectly through employee engagement (EE). Key contributing factors include flexible work environments, opportunities for personal development, and digital work support. The study offers several practical recommendations for enhancing Gen Z employee experience and performance in dynamic startup settings, thereby improving talent retention and organizational agility.

Keywords*: Employee Experience (Ex); Generation Z; Job Performance (JP); Employee Engagement (EE); Digital Startups; Human Resource Management; Vietnam; Sem.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, organizations are not only competing through products or pricing, but increasingly through experiences—both for customers and for employees. Among these, Employee Experience (EX) is gaining strategic importance, especially in fast-paced environments such as digital startups, where agility, innovation, and a youthful workforce define the corporate DNA.

Generation Z (born from 1997 onward), raised in a hyperconnected world, brings new expectations to the workplace. They demand autonomy, transparency, real-time feedback, and a sense of being heard. According to Deloitte (2023), nearly 49% of Gen Z employees would consider leaving their jobs within 12 months if the organizational culture misaligns with their values or lacks opportunities for development. This presents a pressing challenge for digital startups in Vietnam: how to craft a positive and engaging EX that meets the needs and aspirations of Gen Z.

While the importance of EX has been widely documented in developed economies (Morgan, 2017; Gallup, 2020), research in Vietnam remains fragmented and rarely addresses the unique context of technology-driven startups. Furthermore, the linkage between EX and job performance among Gen Z has not been thoroughly explored, despite its critical relevance to organizational effectiveness and sustainable growth in startup environments.

➢ *Thus, this Study Aims to*

- Identify the key dimensions of EX as perceived by Gen Z employees in digital startups;
- Measure the impact of EX on individual job performance;
- Propose managerial implications for improving EX to enhance performance and retain top young talent.

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➢ *Research Question:*

How does employee experience influence the job performance of Generation Z employees in digital startup environments?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Employee Experience (Ex)

Employee Experience (EX) has increasingly emerged as a critical construct in modern human resource management, defined as the sum of perceptions, emotions, and interactions that employees experience throughout their entire journey with an organization. According to Morgan (2017), EX is not merely a synonym for job satisfaction or employee engagement; rather, it represents a holistic and continuous framework encompassing every stage of the employee lifecycle—from recruitment to offboarding. Morgan's model identifies three core dimensions shaping EX: the physical environment (the tangible workspace and infrastructure), the technological environment (the quality and accessibility of digital tools), and organizational culture (the norms, values, and leadership practices that influence everyday work life).

Recent studies have expanded this framework. McKinsey & Company (2021) proposed a six-stage employee journey—comprising pre-hire, onboarding, daily work, development, reward, and exit—emphasizing the need for strategic experience design across each phase. This life-cycle approach positions EX as a dynamic, evolving system of interactions that influence not only productivity but also loyalty, innovation, and well-being.

B. Generation Z in the Workforce

Generation Z, typically defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first workforce cohort to have grown up in a fully digitized environment. This generational group enters the labor market with distinct behavioral traits, workplace expectations, and technological fluency. Empirical findings from PwC (2023) highlight that Gen Z employees seek personalized workplace experiences where their voices are heard and their contributions are recognized in real time. They also place high value on flexibility, desiring autonomy over work arrangements, hybrid or remote options, and a healthy balance between personal and professional life.

Moreover, Gen Z demonstrates a strong affinity for socially responsible organizations, preferring to work for employers that align with their ethical values and contribute to broader societal goals. Their natural aptitude for digital tools and rapid learning makes them ideal candidates for dynamic work environments; however, they are also known for a relatively high rate of job turnover, often switching roles if they feel underappreciated or professionally stagnant. In the context of digital startups—where formal structures may be limited and growth trajectories unpredictable—these characteristics present both challenges and opportunities for talent management.

C. Job Performance (JP)

Job performance (JP) is generally defined as the extent to which an individual fulfills assigned duties and contributes to the achievement of organizational goals. Campbell et al. (1993) proposed a multidimensional framework of JP, encompassing task performance (the execution of core duties), contextual performance (behaviors that support the social and psychological environment of the workplace), and adaptive or innovative performance (the ability to adjust, learn, and innovate in response to change).

This comprehensive understanding of JP is especially relevant to digital startups, where change is constant and agility is critical. In such settings, performance is not solely about technical proficiency; rather, it also includes the willingness and capacity to embrace innovation, navigate ambiguity, and contribute proactively to team and organizational development.

D. Prior Research on Employee Experience and Job Performance

A substantial body of research has established the positive relationship between EX and JP, indicating that experience-driven HR strategies can directly influence both individual and organizational performance. Morgan (2017) emphasized that EX is foundational to driving employee engagement, which in turn enhances productivity and retention. Complementing this perspective, Gallup (2020) found that employees reporting a positive experience at work performed 21% better on key performance indicators and were 59% less likely to leave their organizations.

The psychological benefits of EX have also been explored. Kahneman and Deaton (2010) demonstrated that positive workplace experiences are linked to long-term psychological well-being, suggesting that EX contributes not only to immediate job output but also to sustainable human capital. In the Vietnamese context, Nguyen et al. (2022) empirically confirmed a significant relationship between EX and JP, with employee engagement functioning as a mediating mechanism. Their findings underscore the importance of EX as a driver of both motivation and behavioral commitment.

Despite these advancements, most empirical studies have concentrated on traditional corporate environments or large-scale enterprises. There is a paucity of research focusing on EX within digital startups, particularly from the viewpoint of Generation Z employees who may possess divergent expectations and work habits. This gap highlights the need for context-specific investigations, such as the present study, which explores the EX–JP dynamic among Gen Z professionals in the fast-growing digital startup sector in Vietnam.

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III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

A. Theoretical Foundation

This study integrates three theoretical perspectives to construct a robust research framework:

- *Jacob Morgan's EX Model (2017):* Defines EX as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing the physical workspace, technological support, and organizational culture.
- *Kahn's Engagement Theory (1990):* Suggests that employee engagement arises from three psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety, and availability.
- *Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model* (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007): Posits that job resources (such as development opportunities or supportive technology) foster engagement and, in turn, enhance performance.

These perspectives collectively support the assumption that a well-designed employee experience can increase employee engagement, which ultimately leads to improved job performance.

B. Proposed Research Model

Based on the theoretical framework and prior empirical findings, the study proposes a conceptual model as follows:

➢ *Independent Variables (EX Components):*

- *Flexible Work Environment (MT):*
  The degree to which employees have autonomy in choosing work location, time, and modes.

- *Digital Tools & Support (CT):*
  Access to up-to-date technologies that enable efficient work execution.

- *Open Culture & Feedback (VH):*
  The extent of transparent communication, inclusive leadership, and frequent feedback.

- *Personal Growth & Learning (PT):*
  Opportunities for learning, training, and career progression.

➢ *Mediating Variable:*

- *Employee Engagement (GK):*
  The emotional and cognitive involvement of employees in their work roles.

➢ *Dependent Variable:*

Job Performance (HP): The degree to which an employee achieves expected job outcomes.

C. Research Hypotheses

Based on the model, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- *H1*:
  Flexible Work Environment (MT) positively affects Employee Engagement (GK).

- *H2*:
  Digital Tools & Support (CT) positively affects Employee Engagement (GK).

- *H3:*
  Open Culture & Feedback (VH) positively affects Employee Engagement (GK).

- *H4:*
  Personal Growth & Learning (PT) positively affects Employee Engagement (GK).

- *H5:*
  Employee Engagement (GK) positively affects Job Performance (HP).

- *H6:*
  Overall Employee Experience (EX) positively affects Job Performance (HP), both directly and indirectly through Employee Engagement (GK).

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D. Proposed Research Model

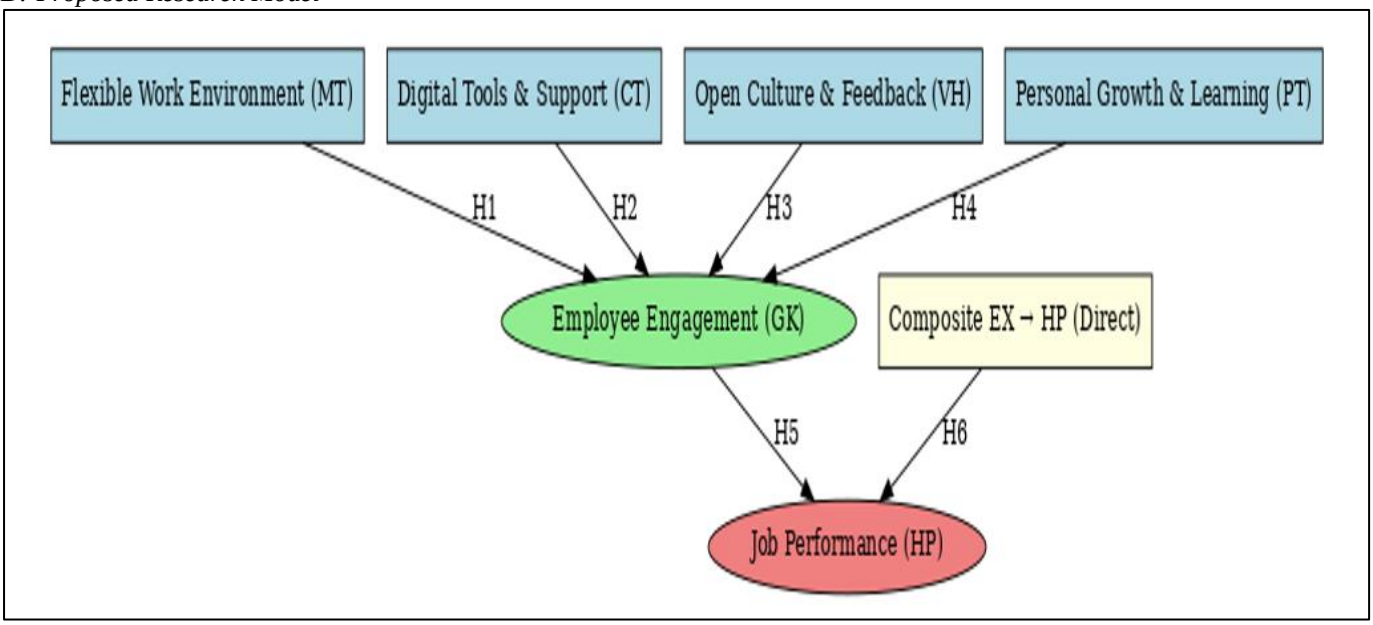

Fig 1 Proposed Research Model and Hypotheses

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design with a descriptive–explanatory approach, aiming to measure and explain the relationships between Employee Experience (EX), Employee Engagement (GK), and Job Performance (HP) among Generation Z employees in digital startups. The theoretical model is tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which enables simultaneous analysis of both direct and indirect effects among latent constructs.

B. Sampling and Participants

The target population comprises Generation Z employees (born from 1997 onward) currently working full-time or part-time in digital startups in Vietnam. Startups span across various sectors, including: Fintech (financial technology), Edtech (education technology), E-commerce, SaaS (software as a service)

A non-probability convenience sampling method was applied, with strict screening criteria to ensure sample relevance and representativeness:

- Minimum tenure of 6 months at the current organization
- Employees born in 1997 or later
- Organizations with clear digital characteristics

Following Hair et al. (2010), the minimum sample size for SEM is five times the number of observed variables. With 25 observed variables, the minimum required sample size is 125. To ensure robustness, the study collected 210 valid responses.

C. Measurement Instruments

Data were collected through an online structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The measurement scales were adapted and validated from well-established international sources, as summarized below:

Table 1 Online Structured Questionnaire

Construct	Source(s)	Items
Flexible Work Environment (MT)	Morgan (2017); PwC (2022)	4
Digital Tools & Support (CT)	Gallup (2021); Venkatesh & Davis (2000)	4
Open Culture & Feedback (VH)	McKinsey (2020); Denison (2006)	4
Personal Growth & Learning (PT)	Saks (2006); Deloitte (2022)	4
Employee Engagement (GK)	Kahn (1990); Schaufeli et al. (2002)	5
Job Performance (HP)	Koopmans et al. (2014); Campbell et al. (1993)	4

In total, the questionnaire includes 25 items across 6 latent constructs

D. Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0, following a rigorous multi-step process:

➢ *Reliability Testing*

Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) was used to assess internal consistency of each construct.

ISSN No: 2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25aug208

➢ *Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)*

- Principal Axis Factoring with Promax rotation
- KMO ≥ 0.6; Bartlett's Test significant at $p < 0.05$
- Factor loadings ≥ 0.50

➢ *Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

- Fit indices: Chi-square/df < 3, RMSEA < 0.08, CFI & TLI ≥ 0.90
- Convergent Validity: Factor loading > 0.50, AVE > 0.50
- Discriminant Validity: AVE > MSV; Composite Reliability (CR) ≥ 0.70

➢ *Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)*

- Path coefficients (β), significance levels (p-values)
- Bootstrapping (5,000 samples) to test mediation effects of engagement

E. Ethical Considerations

To ensure research ethics, all survey participants were informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any point. Data were collected anonymously and used strictly for academic purposes. No personal identifiers were recorded. The research complied with standard ethical guidelines in social science research.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

➢ *Sample Profile*

A total of 210 valid responses were collected from Gen Z employees working in digital startups across Vietnam. The demographic breakdown is as follows:

- Age: 52.4% aged 23–26; 35.2% aged 18–22; 12.4% over 26
- Gender: 55.7% female; 44.3% male
- Work experience: 46.2% with 6–12 months; 35.7% with over 1 year; 18.1% with less than 6 months
- Startup sector: Fintech (30.5%), Edtech (27.6%), E-commerce (25.7%), SaaS (16.2%)

This distribution reflects a typical Gen Z workforce in the digital startup context, ensuring adequate diversity across experience levels and sectors

➢ *Reliability Analysis*

All constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha values ≥ 0.81, indicating strong internal consistency:

Table 2 Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Conclusion
Flexible Work Environment	0.842	Good
Digital Tools & Support	0.869	Good
Open Culture & Feedback	0.813	Good
Personal Growth & Learning	0.873	Good
Employee Engagement	0.889	Very good
Job Performance	0.861	Good

All Alpha values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), confirming the reliability of the measurement scales.

➢ *Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)*

EFA results show:

- *KMO = 0.876*, Bartlett's Test $p < 0.001$ → Data suitable for factor analysis
- All *factor loadings > 0.60*, indicating strong construct validity
- Items loaded cleanly onto six distinct factors corresponding to theoretical constructs
- *No items were removed*

This confirms that the constructs are empirically distinguishable and theoretically sound

➢ *Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

CFA was conducted to validate the measurement model. Fit indices meet standard criteria:

- Chi-square/df = 2.03 (< 3.00)
- RMSEA = 0.062 (< 0.08)
- CFI = 0.934, TLI = 0.927 (> 0.90)

Table 3 Convergent and Discriminant Validity are Confirmed:

Construct	AVE	CR	Conclusion
Flexible Work Environment	0.58	0.84	Satisfactory
Digital Tools & Support	0.63	0.86	Satisfactory
Open Culture & Feedback	0.60	0.82	Satisfactory
Personal Growth & Learning	0.61	0.85	Satisfactory
Employee Engagement	0.65	0.88	Satisfactory
Job Performance	0.59	0.83	Satisfactory

→ The CFA confirms that the measurement model is both statistically adequate and theoretically aligned.

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➢ *Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)*
SEM results show strong model fit:

Chi-square/df = 1.96, RMSEA = 0.059, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.934

Table 4 Path Coefficients are Statistically Significant:

Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value
H1	MT → GK (Flexibility → Engagement)	0.28	< 0.001
H2	CT → GK (Digital Tools → Engagement)	0.31	< 0.001
H3	VH → GK (Culture → Engagement)	0.25	< 0.01
H4	PT → GK (Growth → Engagement)	0.34	< 0.001
H5	GK → HP (Engagement → Performance)	0.39	< 0.001
H6	EX (Composite) → HP	0.22	< 0.05

→ All six hypotheses (H1–H6) are supported. The model demonstrates both direct and mediated effects of EX on Job Performance via Employee Engagement.

- *Notably:*

✓ Personal Growth & Learning has the strongest impact on Engagement (β = 0.34)
✓ Engagement → Performance is the most powerful path (β = 0.39)
✓ EX → Performance shows a moderate but significant direct effect (β = 0.22)

▪ *Structural Equations*
Based on the SEM results, the following standardized structural equations are derived:

▪ *Employee Engagement Equation:*
GK = 0.28·MT + 0.31·CT + 0.25·VH + 0.34·PT

▪ *Job Performance Equation:*
HP = 0.39·GK + 0.22·EX

Where:

- MT = Flexible Work Environment
- CT = Digital Tools & Support
- VH = Open Culture & Feedback
- PT = Personal Growth & Learning
- GK = Employee Engagement
- HP = Job Performance
- EX = Composite Employee Experience

B. Discussion

➢ *The Role of Employee Experience in Engagement and Performance*
The findings underscore that a positive employee experience significantly enhances performance, primarily through the mediating role of employee engagement. These results align well with Kahn's (1990) theory of psychological engagement and the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

- *Growth Opportunities (PT → GK):*
The most influential factor, suggesting that Gen Z values learning, development, and meaningful career paths. This echoes Deloitte (2023), where 61% of Gen Z employees reported leaving jobs that lacked clear growth trajectories.

- *Technology and Flexibility (CT & MT → GK):*
These dimensions reflect Gen Z's preference for autonomy and tech-enabled work, consistent with PwC (2022), which found 74% of Gen Z prefer flexible work formats.

- *Culture and Feedback (VH → GK):*
Although slightly less impactful, open feedback and transparent leadership remain relevant for sustaining engagement.

- *Engagement (GK → HP)*
As a mediator, engagement channels the effect of EX into tangible performance outcomes, validating prior research by Gallup (2020) and Nguyen & Le (2021).

The standardized path coefficients from the SEM provide quantifiable insights into the relationships among the constructs:

✓ Among the EX components, *Personal Growth & Learning (β = 0.34)* exerts the strongest influence on *Employee Engagement*, highlighting Gen Z's strong preference for continuous development and career progression.
✓ *Digital Tools & Support (β = 0.31)* and *Flexible Work Environment (β = 0.28)* also have significant positive effects on engagement, reaffirming the role of technology and autonomy in shaping positive work experiences.
✓ Although *Organizational Culture & Feedback (β = 0.25)* has the lowest effect size, it remains statistically significant, suggesting that transparency, inclusion, and open communication are still valuable to Gen Z.
✓ In the second equation, *Employee Engagement (β = 0.39)* has the strongest direct impact on *Job Performance*, consistent with the engagement–performance link emphasized in the JD-R framework and by Gallup (2020).

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✓ Meanwhile, *Composite Employee Experience (β = 0.22)* also shows a moderate yet significant *direct effect* on performance, suggesting that EX contributes to JP both directly and through the psychological mechanism of engagement.

These equations reinforce the strategic role of EX not only as a driver of engagement but also as a direct predictor of performance outcomes.

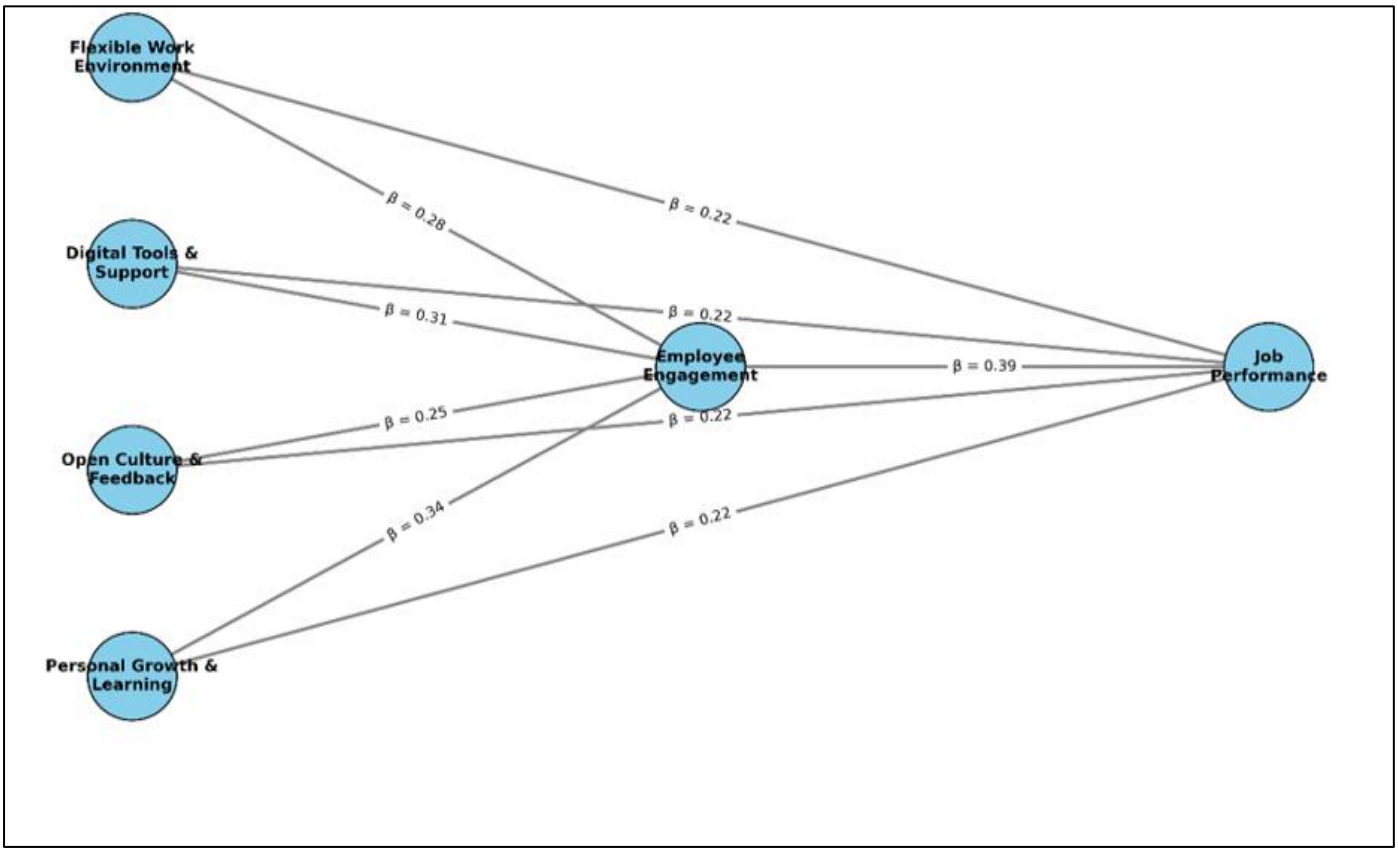

Fig 2 Structural Equation Model with Standardized Path Coefficient

➢ *Alignment with Previous Studies*

- The results reinforce findings from *Gallup (2020)* showing that engaged employees outperform peers.
- *Jacob Morgan (2017)* emphasized that organizations investing in physical space, technology, and culture see higher retention and productivity.
- Studies by *Nguyen et al. (2022) and Nguyen Huu Tai (2023)* confirm that EX positively affects performance in Vietnamese tech firms.

➢ *Contribution to Theory and Practice*

This study adds empirical evidence to the limited literature on Gen Z employees in Vietnamese digital startups, an under-researched context. The validated model offers a practical framework for startup founders and HR professionals to redesign EX strategies in alignment with Gen Z's expectations.

VI. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study offer practical insights for digital startups seeking to enhance the experience and performance of Generation Z employees. Firstly, it is essential to develop clear and personalized career pathways. By designing learning and development programs tailored to individual needs, assigning internal mentors, and establishing transparent promotion criteria, startups can foster motivation and long-term commitment among Gen Z talent. Secondly, investing in a robust digital infrastructure is equally crucial. Providing employees with modern tools such as Slack, Notion, and real-time performance management systems (e.g., OKRs or Agile dashboards) not only improves productivity but also aligns with Gen Z's expectations of a tech-driven workplace. Thirdly, cultivating an open and flexible organizational culture helps increase psychological safety and employee engagement. Organizations can benefit from establishing anonymous feedback channels, encouraging open dialogue, and offering hybrid or remote work options. Finally, startups should take a holistic approach by mapping the employee journey from onboarding to exit. Measuring employee experience using tools such as eNPS or internal EX indices and making data-driven improvements can significantly strengthen both retention and performance outcomes.

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VII. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

A. Conclusion

This study investigates the influence of Employee Experience (EX) on Job Performance (JP) among Generation Z employees in digital startups in Vietnam. Drawing upon data from 210 valid responses and structural equation modeling:

- EX significantly affects JP, both directly and indirectly through Employee Engagement (EE)
- Among EX components, Personal Growth, Technological Support, and Work Flexibility exert the strongest influence on engagement
- The validated model integrates key theoretical frameworks (Morgan, Kahn, JD-R) and fits well in the digital startup context

These findings contribute to academic literature on digital HRM and offer practical frameworks for HR professionals managing Gen Z talent in emerging markets.

B. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its valuable contributions, this study presents several limitations that future researchers may address. The sample was mainly concentrated in major urban centers such as Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, which may not fully represent all startup ecosystems across Vietnam. Furthermore, the use of convenience sampling raises concerns regarding potential selection bias, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation lies in the model's scope, as it primarily focuses on the relationship between employee experience, engagement, and job performance, while excluding other potentially influential variables such as leadership styles, organizational commitment, or turnover intention. Future studies should consider expanding the model to include generational comparisons—particularly with Millennials or Gen X—to gain a more comprehensive understanding of workforce behavior. Moreover, the integration of qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or experience diaries could offer deeper insights into the emotional and behavioral patterns of Gen Z. Lastly, future research may propose and test a localized EX–Performance framework tailored to the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises in Vietnam's dynamic digital economy.

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APPENDICES

➢ *Appendix A – Survey Questionnaire*
All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

- *Flexible Work Environment (MT):* 1. I am allowed to work in a flexible schedule. 2. I have autonomy over when and where I work. 3. My work arrangement supports work–life balance. 4. My organization embraces hybrid/remote work culture.
- *Digital Tools & Support (CT):* 1. I have access to up-to-date work technology. 2. The digital tools provided help me do my job effectively. 3. I receive technical support when needed. 4. The organization invests in digital transformation.
- *Open Culture & Feedback (VH):* 1. There is open communication in my team. 2. Leaders provide regular and constructive feedback. 3. I feel safe to express my opinions at work. 4. The organization values transparency and inclusion.
- *Personal Growth & Learning (PT):* 1. I am given opportunities for skill development. 2. My organization supports career growth. 3. I have access to training or learning resources. 4. I am encouraged to take on new challenges.
- *Employee Engagement (GK)*: 1. I feel enthusiastic about my job. 2. I am mentally absorbed in my work. 3. I find my job meaningful. 4. I am proud to be part of this organization. 5. I feel emotionally connected to my work.
- *Job Performance (HP)*: 1. I complete my tasks efficiently and on time. 2. I adapt well to changes at work. 3. I support my colleagues when needed. 4. I proactively contribute ideas to improve work.

➢ *Appendix B – Summary of Sample Characteristics*

- *Total Valid Responses: 210*

✓ *Age Distribution:*

- 18–22: 35.2%
- 23–26: 52.4%
- Above 26: 12.4%

- *Gender Distribution:*

✓ Female: 55.7%
✓ Male: 44.3%

- *Tenure at Current Startup:*

✓ Less than 6 months: 18.1%
✓ 6–12 months: 46.2%
✓ Over 1 year: 35.7%

- *Startup Sector*

✓ Fintech: 30.5%
✓ Edtech: 27.6%
✓ E-commerce: 25.7%
✓ SaaS: 16.2%

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➢ *Appendix C – Statistical Plots and Diagnostics*

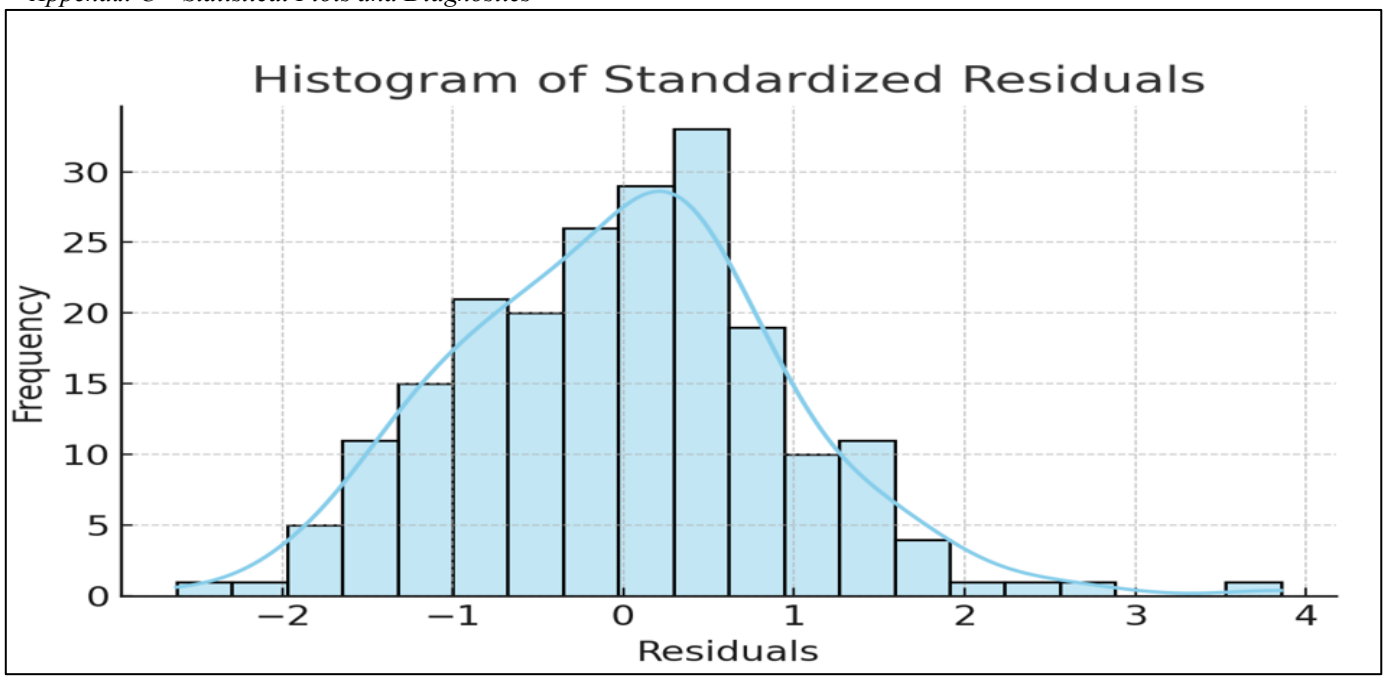

Fig C1. Histogram of Standardized Residuals

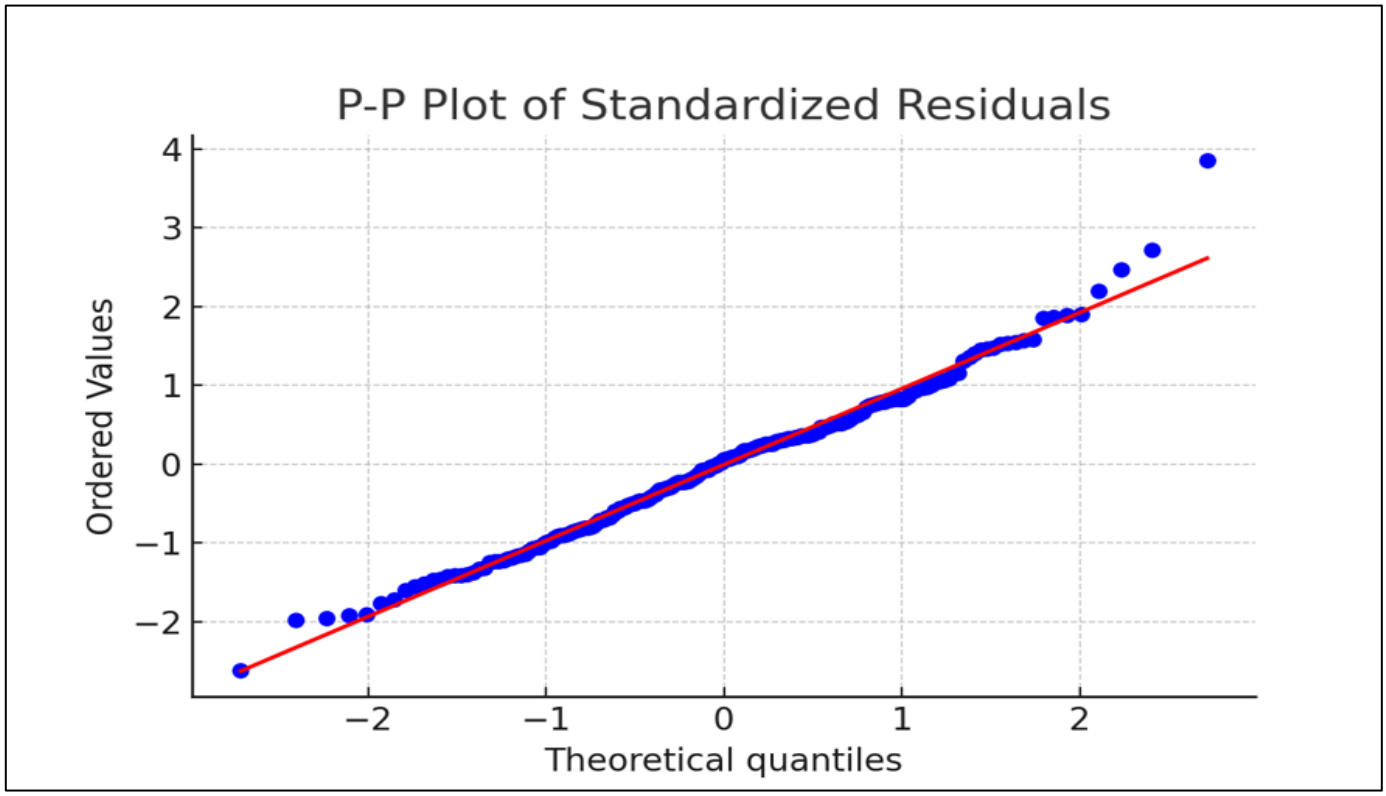

Fig C2. P-P Plot of Standardized Residuals

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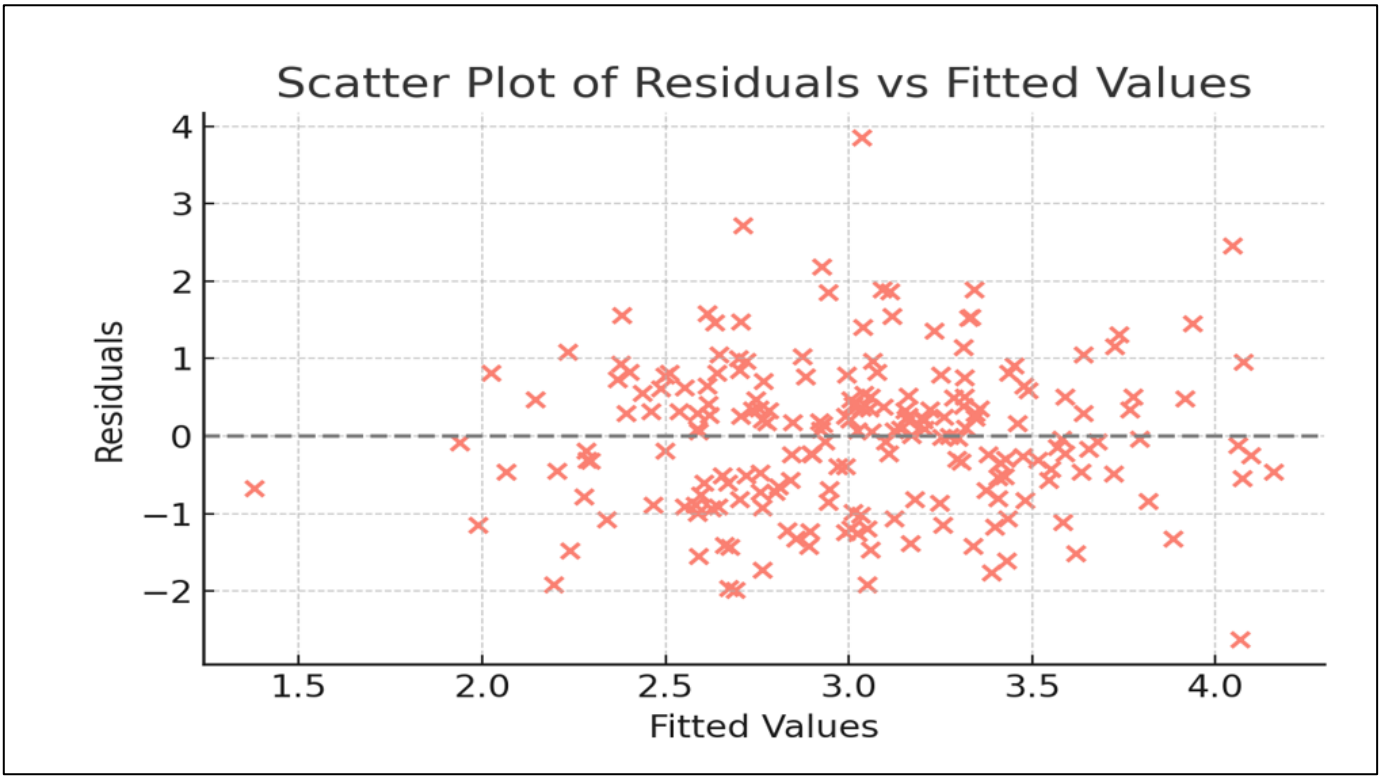

Fig C3. Scatter Plot of Residuals Vs Fitted Values