AAA INSTRUCTIONS ON PREPARING FULL-LENGTH PAPERS FOR THE PROCEEDINGS
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Instructions:

Please use this sample as a template for setting up your FULL-LENGTH PAPER for the AAA Proceedings. Full-length papers can be up to <u>12</u> pages (single spaced) in length total. All references are to be in Journal of Advertising style. Follow this formatting exactly. Full-length papers that do not conform to this formatting will be sent back to the authors(s) to be modified. Refer all questions to the Vice President.

EXAMPLE: FULL-LENGTH PAPER
(Formatting Starts Below)

GENERATION X REVISITED:
AN EXPLORATORY CROSS-CULTURAL CASE STUDY

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Introduction

"In 20 years, the oldest Baby Boomer is about to turn 80, the youngest member of Generation Y will start her thirties, and the oldest member of Generation X will be eligible for social security benefits" (Wellner 2003, p. 24).

Companies around the world are trying to determine how to meet the needs of a generation that in 10 years is "going to run the show" (Ward 2005). It has been predicted that there will be a national shortage of 10 million workers by 2008 in the Unites States alone, and the generation that is expected to fill the retiring baby boomers' shoes on a global level is Generation X, generally defined as individuals born between 1965 and 1978 (Calavita 2004).

The belief in generational uniqueness is not new. Advertisers have tried for the past 80 years to tap into the youth market and search for insights into their psyche (Giles 1922). In addition to demographics, advertisers measure psychological characteristics of consumers, including common beliefs, opinions, interests, personalities, and behaviors, in order to identify and understand prospective users of a brand (Parente 2004). Most studies currently focus on Generation Y, the generation immediately following Generation X, comprised of 18-24 year olds (Wolberg and Pokrywczynski 2001). However, trade publications in the advertising and media field are publishing more and more articles about Generation X, primarily because this segment continues to be difficult to reach for advertisers (Overington 2005). Coughlin and Wong (2003) found that Xers, who had previously been described as "the slacker generation," have matured into an ambitious, independent and self-sufficient generation who are "anything but irresponsible," especially when it comes to family and parenting. They are more conservative, ethically aware, spiritually involved, and family-driven. Perhaps based on their own upbringing in often single-parent households, Generation Xers' family values include family stability and tradition. They also contemplate staying at home with their young children instead of rushing back into the workforce. This demographic is considered a "tough market" that is anything but brand-loyal (DeBaugh 2003).

Companies are facing similar trends in other countries, yet advertisers have been reluctant to target different cultures, partially because they don't know how to communicate effectively with them (Seitz 1998). Corporations worldwide increasingly participate in the international marketplace, facing growing competition from

foreign multinational corporations both at home and abroad. In 2006, the global advertising market grew by almost 5%, of which more than half was generated in the Americas, followed by countries in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe, almost equally sharing the remaining market (Datamonitor 2006a). The Japanese advertising market leads the Asia-Pacific region with more than 60%, followed by China generating about 25% of the market. The United Kingdom and Germany lead the European advertising market with 25.1% and 22.4%, respectively. Although the overall growth of the U.S. market and global advertising market as a whole are predicted to decelerate during the next five-year period, the Japanese and German markets are expected to accelerate. Understanding members of Generation X in these three countries in terms of who they are psychographically is an important component as global companies attempt to appeal to a demographic that is going to dominate the workforce in the next 10 years.

The vast majority of the existing literature about Generation X and its value to advertisers and marketers focuses on Gen Xers in the United States. Only a few studies examine Gen X in other countries in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe. The most recent one exploring German Gen Xers is a best-selling German-language book by Illies (2000), who coined the term "Generation Golf" in reference to the popular Volkswagen Golf that many young Germans favor. Japanese Gen Xers, who are also known as "Shinjinrui" (the new breed), was published in the mid-nineties (Herbig and Borstorff 1995). As generational cohorts change over time, it is necessary to explore how Generation X has changed. Several quantitative studies exist that focus on media consumption patterns and preferences of Gen Xers, but rich, qualitative descriptions of this generational cohort are scarce. Therefore, a qualitative study is necessary to explore how Gen Xers in these three leading economies define their generation at this point in time. Japan is still the second-largest advertising market in the world, making the Shinjinrui one of the most lucrative target markets to domestic and international advertisers (Datamonitor 2006a). Germany is the second-largest economy in the European Union (behind the United Kingdom), and one of the fastest growing advertising markets (Datamonitor 2006e).

This study draws on generational cohort theory (Inglehart 1977) and social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann 1966) to better understand Generation X in three of the strongest economies in the world: the U.S., Japan, and Germany. The purpose of this exploratory cross-cultural case study is to explore how members of Generation X who were born and raised in these three countries describe their generation. "Generation X" is defined as individuals born between 1965 and 1978. The article describes the results of a pilot study designed as part of a mixed methods study.

Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

According to generational cohort theory, historical events of national significance have an impact on existing social orders and value systems and thus result in new generational cohorts (Inglehart 1977). The theory is based on two assumptions. First, the socialization hypothesis suggests that adults' values formed during childhood and adolescence and that these basic values stay relatively stable. They usually reflect the socio-economic conditions an individual grew up in. Social constructivist theory suggests that reality is socially constructed by individuals and groups in a dynamic process (Berger and Luckmann 1966). It proposes that all knowledge, including everyday reality, is created by social interactions.

Generational cohort theory and social constructivist theory provide a conceptual framework for this study, suggesting that Gen Xers as a generational cohort were heavily influenced by the previous generation that provided for them. As part of a dynamic process, generational cohorts can change over time, implying that it is necessary to re-define this group because in the case of Japan and Germany, it has been more than a decade since researchers have studied it in depth. By inquiring about Gen Xers' formative years, this study will provide a description of a market segment that can eventually become a platform for the second, quantitative phase of this study. The central question for the study is: "How do American, Japanese, and German consumers born between 1965 and 1978 and raised in their respective countries, describe their generation?" The following sub-questions were utilized:
1. How do American, Japanese, and German Gen Xers describe social, historical, and political events that shaped who they are today?
2. What role did family and friends play in the upbringing of members of this generation?
3. What type of advertising appeals to Gen Xers/Shinjinrui?

Literature Review

In a global market, corporations increasingly face growing competition from foreign multinational corporations both at home and abroad. In 2006, the global advertising market grew by 4.8% to reach a value of $67

billion, of which 57.8% were generated in the Americas (U.S., Canada, Brazil, and Mexico), followed by 21.2% in Asia-Pacific (Australia, China, India, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea), and 21% in Europe (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the U.K.) (Datamonitor 2006a). The Japanese advertising market leads the Asia-Pacific region with a market share of 61.2%, followed by China with a 25.6% share (Datamonitor 2006b). The German advertising market is the second largest in Europe with a 22.4% market share behind the United Kingdom (Datamonitor 2006e). The U.S. remains the biggest advertising spender in the world, generating 54.8% of its market value. Its advertising market grew by 4.8% in 2006 and now has a value of $36.7 billion (Datamonitor 2006c). While the overall growth of the global advertising market is predicted to decelerate during the next five-year period, the markets in the U.S., Japan, and Germany are expected to grow by 3.3%, 1.6%, and 1%, respectively (Datamonitor 2006c, 2006d).

International advertisers often use the same message that has worked in the United States and run it with only small adaptations in other countries. These "standardized" campaigns are primarily used to save costs but are often ineffective because they do not reflect the culture of the country in which it runs. Research shows that targeted media are most useful when they reflect the intended audience's cultural background (Appiah 2001; McGuire 1984; Pitts et al. 1989). In addition, Mick and Buhl (1992) state that when consumers encounter an advertisement, their reaction to it depends on the meaning they assign to it, which in turn depends on characteristics of both the ad and the individual consumer. According to McCracken (1986), advertising enables meaning to "pour from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods." It is therefore important to bring the cultural world and the good together in a "special harmony" that makes it possible for a consumer to see the "similarity and effect the transfer of meaningful properties." Therefore, it is crucial for advertisers to understand different cultures and sub-cultures such as generational cohorts in depth.

Identifying and understanding the target audience is a critical decision in advertising because it is the heart of every campaign (Parente 2004). Market segmentation is one of the most powerful strategic tools advertisers can use to craft messages that will communicate effectively and cost-efficiently with a clearly defined target audience. Advertisers commonly define a target audience based on several criteria, including demographics, psychological characteristics called "psychographics," lifestyles, product/brand usage, and geodemographics. When advertisers prepare a psychographic profile of an audience, they classify groups of individuals according to common beliefs, opinions, interests, personalities, and behaviors (Parente 2004). Researchers believe that consumers' behaviors such as their purchasing patterns are often more influenced by sociopsychological factors than by their demographic characteristics. Advertisers are constantly trying to improve their understanding and interpretation of psychographics, which is often difficult to master, especially when it concerns a specific demographic group in a different country such as Japan or Germany. An effective way to segment audiences is by "generational cohorts." While it is known that generational cohorts may vary internally, they do provide broad descriptions of "a group of individuals that have 'come of age' together" (Littrell, Ma, and Halepete 2005, p. 408).

Definition of "Generation"

Before studying a group of individuals in a generational cohort, it is necessary to define the term "generation." Lüscher (1993) describes it as a timeframe spanning approximately 30 years. Individuals belonging to a specific generation have a homogenous awareness of their generation, typically including a specific age range as well as sense of belonging. Von Engelhardt (1997) differentiates between three obligatory "generational experiences." The first one deals with one's immediate family. Every individual is born into a specific generation as a child. The other two generations in a family are typically parents and grandparents, and individuals can belong to several different generations during their lifetimes. Children typically become parents and then grandparents as they age. Von Engelhardt points out that as an individual matures, especially as a teenager, he or she develops a specific relationship/attitude towards the generation of his or her parents, which in turn, becomes characteristic of his or her own generation. The second generational experience deals with society because all generations are bounded by a societal system. Within this system, which is part of a social group, each member of the generation has a specific role. In addition to one's biological and socio-cultural generation, an individual also belongs to a historic generation. Historical events directly influence one's life, including political and cultural events. Different generations have been influenced by different historical events, which are often expressed in specific political and religious ideologies, as well as literature. Therefore, when defining a specific generation, it is important to consider all of the aspects mentioned above.

Generation X in the United States

Researchers have had a difficult time defining this generation, which once had been labeled the "slacker generation," but on the other hand practically invented the 60-hour workweek (Ward 2005). According to Ward

(2005), "it's safe to assume that if you're too old for American Idol, but too young to remember TV before the remote control, you probably belong." The age range researchers consider belonging to Generation X range between 25 and 40, containing roughly 25 percent of the U.S. population (Bartlett 2005; Overington 2005; Watkins 2005).

According to the Encyclopedia of Popular Culture, Generation X in the U. S. comprises roughly 79 million people born between the 1961 and 1981 (Isaksen 2000). The term was popularized in the early nineties after the release of Coupland's novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1991), in which the author describes three individuals in their early twenties, who are underemployed, overeducated, and unpredictable. Characterized by the media as "lazy, laconic, and unfocused," for those outside the generation, the "X" stands for some "unknown variable, implying young adults searching for an identity" (Isaksen 2000). However, the generation turned out to be quite conservative after all. Now in their thirties and early forties, individuals belonging to this generation put family values first, work hard, and save money. They tend to view themselves as diverse, individualistic, determined, independent, and ambitious (Isaksen 2000).

Generation X emerged from many shared experiences and cultural circumstances grounded in the self-involved consumption patterns of the 1980s and the decade of the 1990s, which was filled with social problems, including teen suicide, widespread homelessness, toxic waste, violent crime, the AIDS epidemic, a down-sizing of the workforce (un- and underemployment), rising divorce rates, and working parents (Isaksen 2000). Generation Xers often resent their parents, most likely baby boomers, for "leaving them to repair and endure a society on the brink of collapse (Isaksen 2000)." According to Overington (2005), cash and status are not as important to Generation Xers when compared to baby boomers. Instead, they are much more family-focused, spending more quality time with their children, and redefining traditional gender roles marked by a more equitable division of labor when compared with their parents. Overington also points out that Generation Xers carry more debt than their parents, especially from credit cards and student loans.

Generation X comprises fewer individuals than the baby boomers before them and echo boomers (or "Generation Y") after them, but marketers have realized that in ten years this generation will be the ones "running the show" (Ward 2005). In addition, they tend to be quite willing to try new things, which is important for marketers who are always looking for opinion leaders and early adopters. They have also been described as the driving force behind the development of and success of new media outlets, including cable TV, talk programming, blogs, satellite radio, and the Internet.

However, marketers consider this demographic a "tough market" that is anything but brand-loyal (DeBaugh 2003). Ward (2005) states Generation Xers have traditionally been skeptical of conventional marketing efforts. Their cautious and fiscally conservative nature has proven to be a challenge for marketers. As the best educated generation in America's history they were "raised on commercial hyperbole" (Isaksen 2000). It is important to note, however, that Generation Xers are receptive to "crisp, sophisticated, humorous, and informative advertising" and quite capable of distinguishing between an honest and insincere message. In addition, Xers use sarcasm and irony to keep the world in perspective, and they tend to judge advertising accordingly. They are also very vocal about their experiences with purchases they have made. Ward (2005) suggests providing third-party affirmation for product claims from sources this generation trusts.

Xers have always been "on the go," which reflects how they consume news, entertainment and other information. In addition to creating witty, sophisticated messages to appeal to Xers, advertisers also need to pay attention to the right media mix. According to industry professionals, Generation Xers are one of the smallest consumer segments of mainstream media. Instead, they often opt for media choices such as *The Onion* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, reflecting their cynical and skeptical attitude toward traditional marketing and the media. In terms of television programming, Generation Xers also favor shows centered on friends and family, serialized story lines, and the use of music, resulting in success for shows like *Friends, ER, Seinfeld, Melrose Place, The X-Files,* and *Party of Five.* Isaksen (2000) credits the large chunk of Generation X presence in the television audience with the launch of three networks: Fox, UPN, and the WB. Generation Xers are on-line "all the time" (Bartlett 2005) and consider the Internet a way of life, reading the newspaper on-line instead of the paper version. Blogs and podcasts have become increasingly useful when communicating with this "on-the-go" audience.

Generation X in Japan: "Shinjinrui"

Generation X has become an important segment on a global level. However, based on cultural differences, not all members of this generational cohort have the same attitudes, beliefs and values worldwide. In fact, different "versions" of Generation X exist in different countries (Plettenberg 2005). While most Gen X studies focus on the U.S., some studies have investigated the generational cohort in Asia, specifically focusing on media consumption patterns.

Dou, Weng, and Zhou (2006) investigated media preferences of China's Generation X consumers and found that they paid more attention to entertainment-based media such as television variety shows or pop music on the radio than their predecessors. Information-based programs such as television news and newspapers, as well as economy/business reports were less frequently reported. Furthermore, the authors found regional discrepancies among Chinese Gen Xers. Those who lived in more developed regions appear to consume information-based media more heavily than entertainment-based programs. Dou et al. conclude that cohort effect of media consumption patterns among Chinese Gen Xers exist, but it appears to be weaker in more developed regions of China, specifically for entertainment-based media programs.

Gen Xers from Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong appear to have a favorable attitude towards advertising and marketing in general (Ewing and Caruana 1999). Although many of them do not necessarily see their values portrayed in advertising directed toward them, they acknowledge that advertising as an institution plays an important role in sustaining a healthy economy. They believe that in general, advertising helps them in their purchase decision-making because it provides information that will help them keep a good social image, which is an important aspect in Asian culture. At the same time, these Gen Xers believe that advertising adds to consumers' level of materialism and "leads children to make unreasonable demands on parents" (p. 49). Taiwanese Gen Xers appear to use newspapers most frequently, followed by network and cable television, magazines, radio, and movies. Use of on-line media was not measured in this study (Kuo 1996).

The most recent study investigating Gen Xers specifically in Japan, describes the cohort as "children who have grown up in […] an affluent, wealthy, powerful, influential, arrogant Japan (Herbig and Borstorff 1995, p. 49). The term "Shinjinrui" (new breed) was developed during 1985, meaning "shinjin-rui" (new faces) and "shin-jinrui" (new human race).

Nearly 120 million individuals in Japan fall into the Shinjinrui category. They are highly trained and expect high-level jobs. Researchers also coined the term "Shirake Sedai" (the "reactionless" generation) because they appear to show little interest in politics (Woronoff 1981). Members of the Shinjinrui are believed to be spoilt and overprotected because their parents always provided them with what they wanted. Although they are well educated, they have difficulties making decisions because everything was always done for them. Some call them the "goldfish generation" because they "have to be hand-fed everything" (Herbig and Borstorff 1995, p. 50). The study further claims that young Japanese do not respect their parents. This phenomenon led to the attitude that it is acceptable not to help others, which is a direct contrast to existing Confucian values that build the foundation for traditional Japanese virtues such as loyalty, hard work, and respect for elders. In fact, Shinjinrui appear to be the exact opposite of their predecessors whose lives centered on work. Instead, they work to live, are practical, easy-going, and "disturbingly money-minded" (p. 51). In addition, "kojinshugi" (individualism) is desirable among members of this generation. They value freedom of expression but not to the point where they might stand out. Friends are also very important to this cohort because they provide a sense of security.

Herbig and Borstorff describe the Shinjinrui as "egocentric and selfish" (p. 52), more concerned with short-term problems that affect themselves than caring about the well being of the group. They conclude that Japan is becoming a "nation of individuals, each engaged in the pursuit of his or her own personal goals" (p. 53). In addition, they view Japan as a victim instead of an aggressor because their education emphasizes the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They appear to be overly nationalistic compared to their predecessors. In summary, the Shinjinrui work to live, to enjoy their family and not commit themselves entirely to their work, company, and country. They also expect a higher standard of living than the previous generation (Herbig and Borstorff 1995).

German Generation X: "Generation Golf"

According to Plettenberg (2005), a trend of new conservatism recently emerged across Europe, especially in Germany. As in the United States, individuals belonging to Generation X in Germany value marriage and family and are highly goal-oriented. Research shows that this demographic is difficult to define psychographically because young Germans tend to "mix and match" identities from many influences.

In his best-selling German-language book, Illies (2000) defines this generation as "Generation Golf," and characterizes members belonging to this cohort as hedonistic, non-political, and generally driven by materialism. He describes the generation as somewhat superficial and careless but also discusses how much they value authentic relationships. A key moment in this cohort's teenage years was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. However, instead of actively participating in this historic event, they experienced it entirely through the media. According to Illies, members of this generation have a difficult relationship with their cultural identity, which is mostly based on extreme feelings of guilt stemming from the horrific atrocities committed during World War II. Furthermore, Illies describes the lack of patriotism and wish of many young German Gen Xers for the unraveling of their national identity.

Members of Generation Golf grew up during a period of economic prosperity and as a result, developed a strong belief in high-end consumer brands. Their brand loyalty to the Volkswagen Golf inspired Illies to refer to this generation as "Generation Golf." Illies describes how the VW Golf has played some role in almost every member of this generation and is still considered a desirable brand for many to this date. As the German advertising market is expected to accelerate in the near future, it becomes increasingly important for American advertisers to fully understand the German "version" of Generation X (Datamonitor 2005).

Method

Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as "an inquiry process based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem." The qualitative methodology was appropriate for studying the complex, holistic picture of America, Japanese, and Germany members of Generation X and the issues they face by exploring and displaying aspects of their complexities. Case study was chosen as the qualitative method for this study. Case studies investigate "a contextualized contemporary…phenomenon within specific boundaries" (Hatch 2002). Stake (1995) defines cases as "bounded systems" and objects rather than processes. Case study research focuses on particularization, not generalization. Therefore, the number of cases is not as important as the uniqueness of cases (Stake 1995).

A total of 12 cases were constructed that were bounded by space and time in that each of the respondents was born between 1965 and 1978 and raised in either the U.S., Japan, or Germany. The cases were furthermore bounded by time in that the participants were all interviewed during a five-month period between November '06 and September '07. All 12 cases are instrumental in nature because they help the researcher understand something new, in this case the different characteristics of Generation X in the three countries (Stake 1995).

The sample included twelve participants (four males and eight females) who were identified through maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling is designed to elicit participation of cases that can provide multiple perspectives about the research question (Creswell 1998). This strategy allowed the researchers to identify both common patterns and diverse views concerning the description of the generational cohort in the country under investigation. The sample included individuals who were well educated as well as both single and married individuals with and without children who grew up in different geographic regions in their respective countries (urban and rural).

Data collection consisted of phone interviews of 60 minutes each that were conducted over a period of nine months. After IRB approval and informed consent were obtained, the interviews were recorded in Japanese, German or English, and then translated and transcribed verbatim in English. Typological analysis was used during the analysis of the interview data. This type of analysis requires the transcripts to be coded and analyzed until themes and patterns emerged (Hatch 2002). The data were disaggregated into four predetermined typologies that were generated from the research questions and based on Von Engelhardt's (1997) definition of "generation," which includes three obligatory generational experiences, including family, societal, and historical experiences, including three obligatory generational experiences such as family, societal, and historical experiences. The historical experiences include political and cultural events a person experiences in his or her lifetime. The typology of "popular culture" was added and reported separately because the focus of this study was on media and advertising, which are both part of current culture.

Data verification and validation was accomplished through three procedures. Member checks were used to verify "the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Creswell 1998, p. 202). Study participants from each case reviewed the initial interpretations of the case for "accuracy and palatability," providing validation (Stake 1995, p. 32). Rich, thick description provided depth for the description of themes in the form of direct quotes from the participants of the study (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Finally, methodological triangulation was used to find meaning in the analysis of the cases in order to increase confidence in the interpretation of the findings (Stake 1995).

Results

The qualitative analysis of the five study participants' in-depth interviews revealed a set of themes that corresponded to the original typologies for this study. The discussions in this section are presented using the organizational structure of the following four typologies: family, society, history, and popular culture. The five themes emerged from this study are: (1) "Family: A Strong Foundation", (2) "History: Finding Common Cultural Ground," (3) "Society: Economic Boom and Bust," (4) Society: Building Authentic Relationships," and (5) "Media and Advertising: An Honest but Subtle Form of Art."

TABLE 1
Typological Analysis

	Family	History	Society	Popular Culture
Themes	A Strong Foundation	Finding Common Cultural Ground	Economic Boom and Bust	Media & Advertising: An Honest and Subtle Form of Art
			Building Authentic Relationships	

Description of Cases

The U.S. respondents included two males and two females from the West Coast, the South and the Midwest. The sample was ethnically diverse and included single and married individuals. While the respondents all had at least a college degree, they came from different types of families, including single parent families and parents with or without college degrees. Some of the respondents had families of their own and were either married or single.

The Japanese sample included four female and one male respondent. Their hometowns include Uji City in southern Kyoto, Osaka City in the Osaka prefecture, rural Shimonoseki in the Yamaguchi prefecture, Takatsuki City in Osaka, and Shizuoka. Some of the respondents consider their families belonging to middle class, upper middle class, and working class. Some of them have children, are single, married, or divorced. Most of them work full-time but two of them are stay-at-home parents.

The German respondents included two women and one man from different areas in Germany. They all had advanced degrees and currently reside in Germany. One individual was married with children, while the other two were single individuals.

Thematic Analysis

Family: A Strong Foundation. One common theme that emerged from the interviews with members of Generation X in all three countries is that family is a very strong cornerstone in their lives. Almost all respondents indicated that they experienced a "happy childhood," whether they grew up in a traditional family setting or as a member of a single parent household. As one Japanese respondent states, "My parents were born in the middle of World War II and were raised in the hard times after the war. They were those who supported the post-war economic miracle. They were the workaholics and received what they worked for. So our generation was materialistically blessed. The parents were buying their kids what they wanted. They were working incredibly hard, working overtime, working on Saturdays."

This strong family foundation may have enabled members of this generation to acquire and own material items their parents would not have purchased for themselves, which in turn "softened" them. One German respondent referred to his parents as "rocks in the surf." They were always there for support when it was needed and generally provided a safe and prosperous environment. Although families provide a strong foundation for Gen Xers in all three countries, many of them became "latchkey kids," who would come home to an empty home after school because both parents worked full-time and grandparents no longer lived in the same home.

As former latchkey kids, members of Generation X appear to be split regarding whether or not they should start their own families. There was no clear cultural pattern among the respondents in this regard. Some indicated that they decided to stay home and give up their careers after the birth of a child, while others embraced their lives without children. The German and American female respondents leaned more toward staying home with their children and giving up their careers in favor of the "traditional" family life, even if that may mean giving up a dual income. On the other hand, the Japanese respondents spoke openly about the financial constraints families in larger urban areas, such as Tokyo, face when having children. As one respondent indicated, "People in Japan have to think about the cost of having kids because of the expensive life in Japan. Cars and housing are expensive if you live in Tokyo. For that you have to be wealthy and to raise a child you need approximately one million yen until they become independent."

History: Finding Common Cultural Ground. Members of Generation X are very much aware of the significant historical changes affecting their respective cultural identities, not just in their own countries, but on a global scale. The German respondents, for example, are still struggling with the guilt associated with the atrocities

committed by the Nazis in World War II. However, much of Germany's history other than World War II was neglected in their education. "We talked a lot about National Socialism but with the fall of the Berlin Wall, we finally started to understand what else was behind the division of Germany. It really had an influence on me, especially because the reunification also caused several social and political problems." At the same time, this German respondent explains that many young Germans her age feel "collective guilt" for what happened during World War II. "It was horrible and we must never forget what happened, but it's time to let go." Finding common cultural ground between former East and West Germans remains a difficult task for members of Generation X because they grew up during a time when Germany was divided. A similar theme emerged among U.S. members of this generational cohort, but in terms of racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity. Three of the respondents realized that their generation may be the first one in the U.S. that embraced diversity. "[In my school] we were all different races, we were all different religions, we were from all different socio-economic backgrounds. It was across the board. As I have gotten older, I really value that because it taught me how to deal with different types of people."

Another theme that emerged from the historical typology was "*Economic Boom and Bust.*" Growing up during a time of economic stability and strength Gen Xers from each country described what it was like to grow up in a strong economy. Their parents provided them with everything they needed and wanted, whether it was a materialistic item or access to quality education. "We were flooded with consumer goods. We had dinner parties throughout the year and my boss would pay for everything. We would receive huge bonuses, gifts, and trips twice a year. When I was there, I didn't realize that I was in a very special world. When I look back now, it was like a dream." The older portion of this generation still enjoyed all of the benefits of the economic boom but those individuals who were born in the mid- to late '70s remembered the consequences of an economic downturn, especially the Japanese and German respondents.

The German members of Generation X also experienced a strong economy when they grew up, followed by economic uncertainty because of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. As a result, some of the German and Japanese respondents experienced difficulties finding jobs after graduation, especially the younger members. "One Japanese respondent describes this period of time as "war-like," with many young people not prepared to deal with a weakening economy. When Japan experienced an economic downturn in the mid-nineties, the gap between rich and poor widened. "I think in our generation, winners and losers became clear." Several respondents did not realize that they grew up in a strong economy. One respondent indicated that she didn't know how to appreciate it because she had taken it for granted. "I wish I could have experienced the [economic] collapse first, then the bubble, like the baby boomers did."

A German respondent mentioned that many of her friends complained about the economic situation in Germany during the years after reunification. "Everybody is unhappy and complaining about the economic situation even though the standard of living continues to be high. It's complaining on a higher level. The government should consider sending everybody on a journey around the world. Twenty percent would not return and the other 80 percent would come back and be thankful that they may live in Germany."

The American respondents who grew up in rural areas mentioned the effects of farming bankruptcies in the '70s and '80s. "I saw it disrupted a lot of people's lives. So it was pretty clear to me at a very young age that I had to do something else with my life and that I had to find a different profession."

Society: Building Authentic Relationships. Building authentic relationships with family, friends, and co-workers is important to members of Generation X in all three countries. As one Japanese respondent explained, the ability to build relationships with colleagues is especially important in one's professional life. "In Japan, as long as you can build relationships with people in a firm you can survive. Social skills are more important than your competency because even if you can demonstrate great ability, if you can't function in a group, then you can't be utilized."

Members of this generational cohort felt protected and safe when they grew up, which had an effect on their relationships with their parents and friends. After school, they would spend time with friends and engage in extracurricular activities (many of which were planned and scheduled by their parents). In comparison to their German and American counterparts, Japanese Gen Xers did not have much "free time" because their parents emphasized the importance of supplemental educational activities in preparation for college.

Media and Advertising: An Honest but Subtle Form of Art. In response to describing effective advertising, most of the respondents were able to give examples of commercials that ran when they were growing up. This is not surprising because watching television was a popular way in all three countries to spend quality family time together. Most of the commercials were family-related and therefore resonated with the audience. Some of the German and Japanese respondents commented on the negative effect of using American hard sell advertising techniques. The Japanese respondents were outright offended by direct (rude) comparisons used in many American-

produced commercials. "I would be more convinced to hear good things about the product than when I hear a direct comparison to another product." Negative words such as "divorce" or "lawsuit" are another way to offend this generation of Japanese.

Both Japanese and German respondents mentioned that advertisers in their respective countries should refrain from using the English language in their messages. "In the last few years there have been many Americanized words in our language. I don't really like that," said a German respondent. The Japanese respondents indicated that they would prefer more honesty in the use of models depicted in the ads as well. One of the Japanese respondents indicated that one reason many Japanese are not as patriotic as they used to be is because of globalization and increased exposure to other cultures. For example, when she grew up Western pop culture was very popular and often reflected in advertising. "I didn't like that they used Western people so often in commercials. Japan's culture is not protected. I like foreign cultures, but I can't see Japan's people. Sometimes I feel that we want to stand out without thinking." At the same time true individuality was not respected. "It is like 'do what others are doing.' I felt like I didn't fit in."

While the American Gen Xers did not talk much about specific advertising messages, they described their desire for luxury brands such as Esprit, Calvin Klein, and BMW, a passion shared by their counterparts in Japan and Germany. The Japanese respondents had a fondness for Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Dior, while the German respondents spoke passionately about Adidas, Swatch, and Ray Ban sunglasses.

Finally, Gen Xers appear to have slightly different consumption patterns in the three countries under investigation. One component that they have in common is that this generational cohort was the first one that had direct control of their media choices, which started with the rise of the VCR and the ability to access content at a time convenient for them. This notion of controlled communication continues to dominate the way they consume media in their adult lives. Gen Xers in the U.S. and Japan have embraced their Blackberries for instant access to information and entertainment, while the German cohort prefers more traditional media like newspapers and magazines. While television played an important role when they were younger, the respondents indicated that much of the content has decreased in quality, causing them to use the Internet more frequently to access news and information.

Discussion and Implications

Understanding Gen Xers' definition of who they are psychographically is an important component as global companies are trying to appeal to this generational cohort in three of the largest global economies. The purpose of this cross-cultural exploratory case study was to explore how Gen Xers from three different countries describe their generation. The study was rooted in generational cohort theory as well as social constructivist theory and resulted in five themes that will provide advertisers and marketers with a better understanding of this highly desirable market segment.

The findings indicate that the characteristics of a generation are socially constructed and do change over time (social constructivist theory). In addition, a generation's basic values are formed during childhood and adolescence. Historical events as well as the socio-economic conditions members of a generation grew up in appear to affect the formation of their basic values (generational cohort theory).

The main theme that emerged from this study was that members of Generation X grew up in affluent families and then experienced an economic downturn. They never experienced any hardship like their parents did, many of whom grew up during and after World War II. In fact, this generation's access to education and material possessions led them to expect a high standard of living, although they realized after the collapse of the economy that these expectations were not realistic. They appear to appreciate what they had back then, now that many of them are experiencing a slightly lower standard of living. This study found that members of this generational cohort appreciate their parents much more than previously thought (Herbig and Borstorff 1995). The generation that was once believed to be self-centered and egotistic may have evolved into a caring cohort after all.

Generally, this research supports the notion that this generation works to live instead of the other way around. However, this philosophy may manifest itself differently in Japanese and German Gen Xers than in their U.S. counterparts. Gen Xers in the U.S. and Germany have rediscovered the joys of having children on their own and are ready to give up some standard of living in exchange for having children. The Shinjinrui also value family, but are much more cognizant of the cost associated with having children. This finding may be a direct result of a slowing economy, making it much more difficult to provide the same benefits to their children that they enjoyed when they grew up.

Gen Xers in all three countries are very much interested in forming their own identity, which is still somewhat difficult for the German segment of this audience because of their history. In Japan, Gen Xers appear to be concerned with maintaining and perhaps improving their feeling of self and what it means to be Japanese. This finding shows that their value system has "blended" traditional Confucian values with the Western idea of "self." This may be a result of living and interacting in a globalized world, in which most people, especially well-educated individuals, are exposed to other cultures and belief systems.

Advertisers can learn a lot from these themes. When targeting this audience, they should be aware of the issues this generation is dealing with, particularly regarding their opinions about the current economy, their pride for their country, and the shift to more conservative values. It is important to develop subtle advertising messages that imply the benefits of the product or service being advertised without directly stating them. While this finding is not new, the findings of this study indicate that it is important to also allow members of this audience the opportunity to express themselves through the product/service without "standing out too much." Commonly used national cultural communications models such as Hofstede's Five Cultural Dimensions (2001) may not sufficiently describe this generational cohort as part of a national audience because they are in many ways the exact opposite of their parents.

This study has some limitations that should be noted when interpreting the findings. These limitations center primarily on the fact that only twelve participants were interviewed. While generalizability is not the goal in qualitative research (Creswell 1998), it would be beneficial to include more individuals from various backgrounds to maximize learning. For example, this study should include individuals with various educational backgrounds. In the current study each participant had attended college for at least two years. Finally, a quantitative study should be conducted to test whether the themes presented here could be generalized to a larger population. However, the findings of this study should not be ignored because several themes and ideas emerged that added to the existing literature and definition of Generation X in three of the largest global economies. It could serve as a resource and starting point for international advertisers who want to target this generation in Japan.

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