

# Gen Y Women in the IT Sector in India: A Review and Research Agenda



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*India is today considered as one of the youngest nations in the world. With the entry of the Gen Y/millennials in the workforce, IT sector provides plethora of employment opportunities for these young Indians. While a lot of research has focused on the Gen Y context, there is dearth of investigation related to the female employees of Gen Y who constitute a major part of the workforce. The main aim of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework to understand the expectation and experience of the Gen Y women at their workplace and provide further research directions.*

## 1. Introduction

Today India has become one of the youngest nations in the world, with 65% of the population below the age of 35 years, which means that by the year 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years (Rajendram, 2013). With a large number of young population entering the workforce, IT sector which is also one of the major contributors to the Indian Economy has the potential to create enormous employment opportunities for these young Indians.

This young workforce is typically called as the Gen Y. Born in an era of globalization, communication and information technology they are well qualified, independent and assertive (Krywulak & Roberts, 2009). They are also much technology proficient than the prior generations and feel very comfortable to operate in a digital environment. This tech savvy generation with their high expectation of fast-track promotion, handsome perks, flexible work arrangements, work life balance (Zemke, 2001) differentiates them from the other generations.

Also the female employees of Gen Y are believed to be highly career oriented, focused and financially independent. They are equally comfortable in using the digital technology as their male counterparts and make optimum utilization of internet and social media to maintain relations both personally and professionally (Ganesh, 2014). With the overall change in the role of women from being a home-maker to a career oriented women professional creates some unique challenges to HR in engaging and retaining the female talent.

While many of the researchers in the past have focused their study on the Gen Y (Bolton et al, 2013; Hewlett et al, 2009) or on the Multi-generation workforce context (Rajput et al, 2013; Jenkins, 2008), there is a wide scope to study the issues related to the female employees of Gen Y in the IT sector.

The main objective of this study is to undertake a systematic literature review and understand some of the unique attributes of the female employees belonging to the millennial generation from an HR perspective. The further research objective of this paper is derived as:

1. To provide an overview of the change in attitude, beliefs and perception of women towards their personal and professional life.
2. To develop a conceptual framework to understand the expectation and experience of the Gen Y women at their workplace and how the support of organisation, family, society and the HR initiatives can help in bridging the gap between these components.
3. To provide further research directions so that contributions can be made in this field in the future.

## 2. Understanding the Gen Y

### 2.1 Who are Generation Y Employees?

The young population which has recently begun to enter the workforce is typically called as the Gen Y, millennials, Next Generation, Generation Me (Murphy, 2007). They are considered to be born between 1982-2000. However, as there is no widespread agreement regarding the exact birth years of this generation (Bolton et al, 2013). Hence, for the purpose of our research, we will consider them as those who are within the age limit of 20-29 years.

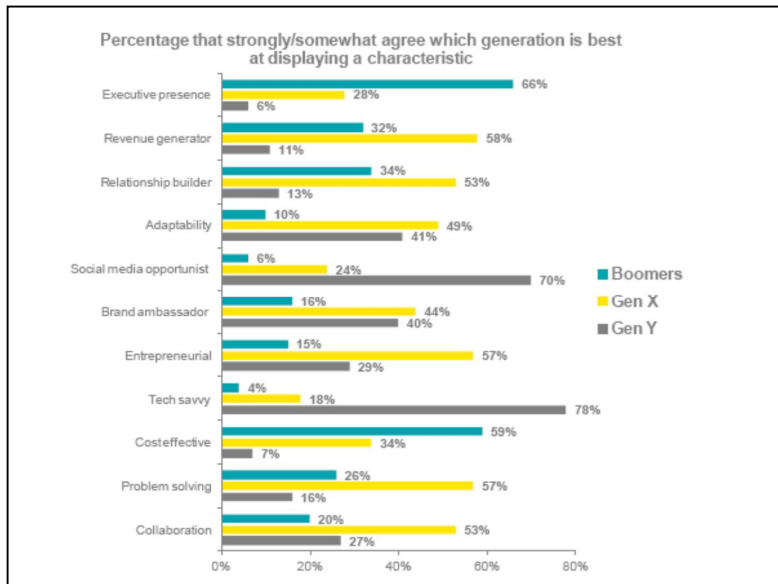
The term "Gen Y" which defines the youth population is gaining a lot of attraction these days. Their open-mindedness, frankness, creativity and multi-tasking approach (Erickson et al, 2009) differentiates them from the other generations. They are technology savvy and operate in the digital environment with ease. They are also not believers of the hierarchical structure and rather prefer a casual and friendly approach in their professional life.

This outlook of the GenYers towards the work culture contrasts them from the traditionalists and the difference amid them occurs not only in terms of demographics but also of the thoughts and approach. Managers today are facing a tough time in identifying the differences and similarities of this tech savvy generation and their attitudes, beliefs with the prior generations.

The Gen Y population is increasing at a tremendous rate all over the world. Today, the Gen Y comprises almost 25% of the total world population (Gibson, 2013) of which a significant number is present in India. More than half of the population in

our country belongs to the young generation which creates both challenges and opportunities for growth. The following table represents some set of characteristics commonly possessed by the Gen Y.

**Table 1** Some Survey Reports on Gen Y  
Members of Each Generation that “best” Display the Following Characteristics



Members of Gen Y were viewed as the “best” at being “tech savvy” (78%) and being social media opportunists, or leveraging social media beyond marketing (70%) – the two largest endorsements any generation received. Gen Y also scored higher than boomers for being the “best” at “collaboration” (27% vs. 20%), “adaptability” (41% vs. 10%) and being “entrepreneurial” (29% vs. 15%).

Source Ernst & Young (2013). *Younger managers rise in the ranks*

**2.2 Definition of Gen Y**

This section tries to explain some of the definitions of Gen Y on the basis of the available literature of the past few years.

**Table 2** Definitions of Generation Y

Reference	Definitions
Armour, 2005	Gen Yers have high expectation of self and employers. They are ready to take new responsibilities and show creativity at work.
Chen & Choi, 2008	Millennials are brought up in an era of globalization. They are academically sound, financially independent, tech savvy and goal oriented.
Tapscott, 2008	The Gen Y has been brought up in the digital environment and are much technology adept than the prior generations. They make the utmost use of social media or internet to stay connected with the world. Hence, they are also called as the Net Generation.
Schweitzer et al, 2010	The Gen Y employees are focused, work oriented and expect rapid growth in their life. At the same time, they also appreciate work life balance and want to give time for their personal life.

**2.3 Comparing and Contrasting the Gen Y women employees from the previous generation:**

Although the status of women in India has improved a lot over the years, there still exist quite many social paradoxes. Earlier, the division of work for men and women was very clearly defined. Where on one hand, men had to go outside for work, women had to stay back at home and take care of their household and children.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century came as a ray of hope especially for the women. The work area which was confined to home and kitchen for women was expanded to offices and board rooms. The corporate world welcomed women whole heartedly and gave equal treatment to its female recruits. The millennial generation has today created a new definition of feminism which represents strength, independence, confidence and optimism. However, glitches still exists in the workplace due to gender differentiation.

Women of 21<sup>st</sup> century are constantly fighting this battle and proving themselves to be on par with men. They have proved themselves as independent earners and not supplementary breadwinners of the family. Women go for job not only to earn money but as it give them an internal satisfaction. Today many of them have also reached the top notch positions in the corporate sector.

While comparing the Gen Y women from the previous generations, clearly indicates a difference not only in demographics but also of values, beliefs, perception and overall lifestyle. However, many philosophers are of the opinion that the women of Gen X and Gen Y are almost the same and can be treated parallel. Through, a systematic literature we have come to a conclusion that there exists a difference between women of these two generations.

In the following table, an attempt has been made to systematically differentiate between women of Gen X and Gen Y.

**Table 3** *Difference between Women of Gen X and Gen Y*

<b>Gen X Women</b>	<b>Gen Y Women</b>
Prioritise family over career.	Career oriented, focused and may prioritise career over personal/family engagement.
Struggle in using the latest technology.	Feel comfortable in the digital environment, tech savvy.
Consider themselves as the secondary earner in the family.	Financially independent and expect to be treated equally with the opposite gender.
Follow the path as set by their predecessors.	Ready to modify the traditional approach and set their own norms.
Gen X women are risk averse and do not make huge investment.	Gen Y women make better investment in equities and do not hesitate to take risk.
Do not want to make any commitments which may lead to compromising their personal life.	Ready to stretch for long hours, travel to distant places or are ready to relocate.

### 3. Expectation of Gen Y Women Employees

Today the population of India stands close to 1.2 billion of which 48.5% are females (Catalyst, 2013). A new era has begun where in the women are entering the corporate sector with lot of hope, enthusiasm and expectation. The Gen Y females with their optimistic attitude have entered the society and are creating a unique definition of women.

The young women employees have not only entered the professional world gracefully but have also proved their talent and convinced everyone that they are critical for the success of their companies. Many corporate have openly accepted that the existence of females have created a positive impact in the company. Many of them have claimed that the presence of women in the corporate board has improved turn over, profits and return on investment (Ganesh, 2014).

Few years ago, the expectation of a woman from her workplace was limited to work life balance, flexibility, safety etc. However, as the role of women in the society has changed, so are her expectations. Today women are much more prepared and specific about what do they exactly expect in terms of support from organization, employers. (Dhawan, 2012).

With the evolution of the new generation, as the roles and responsibilities have reached a high, so are the expectations from the employer in terms of career advancement, salary. Today the Gen Y women consider themselves to be equally capable and efficient than their male counterparts and hence expect equal treatment in the workplace. They try to do their work with full dedication and sincerity and expect appreciation, support and encouragement in return. These "super-women" believe to achieve everything including a great career, job advancement, financial independence as well as sparing time for their personal and family life (Emerick, 2010).

Following is the table which represents some of the key expectations of Gen Y women:

**Table 4** *Expectations of Gen Y Female Employees*

<b>S No.</b>	<b>Expectations</b>
1.	To get work life balance whether or not they are married or have children.
2.	To be treated equally in the workplace especially in cases of promotions, hikes, higher responsibility.
3.	To get support, encouragement for working especially after maternity and be given equal chances of growth and career advancement.
4.	Flexible work options after maternity not only in terms of working hours but also in terms of place of work. Ex: option of work from home.
5.	Greater self-control, autonomy or decision making power.
6.	Not to be considered as incapable of doing a particular work only on basis of their gender.
7.	Employer should give proper justification or should be answerable in cases of any concerns/queries raised.
8.	As the Gen Y women are tech savvy they expect to stay digitally connected with their superiors, peers.
9.	They believe in a flat structure and an open, interactive environment.
10.	Clear definition of roles and responsibilities.
11.	To get a safe, hygienic and flexible work environment.
12.	Facilities like: medical room, doctors/counselor, crèches, transportation etc.

Apart from the expectations mentioned above, there are many other challenges which the HR department faces in managing the Gen Y women. HR tries in meeting up the expectation of the young women by putting best efforts as it is ultimately beneficial for both the employee and the organisation.

#### 4. Experience of Gen Y Women at the Workplace

India is believed to be one of the major upcoming economies in the world. It has one of the largest and youngest workforces available. The growth which India has seen in the last few years is admirable. However, the Indian society is still at the cross ends and there is a wide scope for improvement.

The beginning years in the technology sector are very promising for young women professionals and give the young folks a big scope for growth and career advancement. However, after certain years women suddenly feel stagnancy in their career path which is many times due to the gender gap (Saraswathy, 2014). A slowdown in the job opportunities, pay packages, career growth is experienced by many of them. Apart from that, it is observed that in India IT companies, very few women do secure leadership or senior positions in the company (Iannon, 2013).

Many a times, females complain about feeling differentiated in the workplace because of their gender. Cases of gender discrimination, male domination, glass ceiling etc are common issues of concern (Bhattacharyya & Ghosh, 2012). Following are some of the experiences of the Gen Y women:

- Many a times women have to leave their jobs to take care of their parents or their children as they are being considered to take the primary responsibilities of their family (Ullas, 2013).
- Women may have to leave the work because of the relocation of her spouse. Job leaving in such cases is sometimes taken for granted by the family members.
- Work pressure, late working hours, project deadlines etc may cause difficulty in coping with work life balance issues.
- Women face issues regarding the inability to take decisions in choosing their own career path. In many cases, roles are predefined by the organisations without asking about their opinion. Ex: in case of maternity or post maternity.
- Stringent policies of the organisation sometimes restrict the women from rejoining the organisation after a career break.
- Many a times women are not taken seriously in the organisation because of their gender, age. They are not considered for the senior positions as the companies fear about their capability to handle the work pressure.
- Cases of gender discrimination, gender insensitivity and harassment still stand out as one of the major causes of concern for working women.

A woman who plays multiple roles in the society also encounters multiple challenges in her life whether personal or professional. She faces challenges not only in terms of career advancement or growth but sometimes lack of family or social support also act as a barrier for her. Hence, a collective support from her organization, family and society can help her in career path and life journey. This will also help in ultimately bridging the gap between her expectation and overall experience in the workplace and in reducing the attrition.

#### 5. Support to the Gen Y Females from Organisation, Family and Society

In order to bridge the gap which sometimes exist between the expectations and experiences, support by the organisation, family and society can prove to be very helpful.

##### a) Organisational Support

IT sector is considered as one of the most female friendly sectors in India. Women like to work in this sector due to the safe, healthy and hygienic work environment it provides. Compared to the other sectors, the IT sector is believed to have one of the most free, flexible and women friendly culture (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011). Women in this sector have advanced very well in their career and some of them have also entered the top notch positions or have got placed in the executive board (Sahu, 2008).

However, as women advance in their life, the roles and responsibilities not only enhance but they also become divergent. This creates a major challenge to maintain a balance between the organization demands versus the commitments at home. Earlier, this created a major attrition of the female staff as the women preferred their personal commitments over their careers. But today situation has somewhat changed. Women of Gen Y do not prefer to make any compromises in their career. They want to achieve a perfect balance between their personal and professional life.

The following sub-section majorly focuses on some of the HR initiatives that are taken by the company to support its female staff and some of the suggestions that can be implemented for further improvement.

##### HR Initiatives

The role of HR in ensuring a correct balance between their personal and professional life or between the expectations and experiences is quite crucial. The HR needs to make sure that some of the best practices are being implemented in order to keep the women employees motivated and satisfied.

Today the HR Dept is focusing constantly on giving a supportive hand to its female employees. Various initiatives are being taken in order to ensure that the female employees feel connected at their workplace and continue their journey with the organisation while managing the different commitments of their life.

The following table represents some of the HR initiatives that can be taken in order to ensure support to the female staff.

**Table 5** HR Initiatives to Support Female Staff in the Organisation

S No.	HR Initiatives
1.	Ensuring a just work life balance for both married as well as unmarried females as this generation appreciates it anyways.
2.	Creating a modified engagement plan as per the generational, gender difference rather than “one fit for all” approach.
3.	Rewards and recognition do play an important role. As, women appreciate being recognized for their work.
4.	Managers to be trained properly in handling cases of women hygiene, safety, health or maternity especially male managers.
5.	Constant feedback, determining areas of improvement, doing meaningful work etc are all considered as strong motivating factors.
6.	Ensuring safety, hygiene in the workplace especially the safety of women to be taken care of.
7.	Conducting sessions, seminars related to women empowerment, career management etc.
8.	Flexible career options to women especially after maternity. Ex: work from home, job sharing etc.
9.	To educate women employees about policies related to maternity, time offs etc in advance so that they do not feel scared of losing job.
10.	To ensure that the female employees stay connected using the digital technology and do not feel disconnected in case of career breaks/leaves.
11.	No gender discrimination in case of career advancement, promotions.
12.	To support employees with family or caring responsibilities like aged parents, in laws etc.

In many of the IT companies, some of the above mentioned policies are being practiced. However, gaps still exists and there is scope of improvement. HR is doing a rigorous job in providing training to the managers, conducting counseling sessions and ensuring that cases of gender insensitivity, discrimination do not occur. Apart from that, feedback can be used as one of the most important tool to determine whether the policies and practices are actually useful and to determine the grey areas to be looked upon. Following is the example regarding some of the HR initiatives taken by the IT companies to engage its women employees and the areas that needs to be worked upon.

- **Words of Priti Kataria (HR Head) from Wipro (an IT firm) in India:** “Hiring staff are trained not to ask women candidates any personal questions. They are the ultimate decision makers of their career and questions like this can put them off.”
- **From Archana Bishit, Founder of a counseling organisation:** A male boss ignored the women subordinate who filled a complaint against him. The act was not deliberate but sometimes male bosses lack interpersonal skills and hence needs to be trained.
- Women like men want to be recognised for their work rather than their gender. Companies have set up committees for grievance redressal mechanisms where in women can share their problems or grievances which might adversely impact their careers.

**Source** *The Times of India* (2014). ‘Gender Sensitivity a hot-button issue’

#### **b) Family Support**

The division of work in the family was clearly defined earlier. While women were responsible to take care of the household and children, men had to go out for work and earn money. The involvement of women apart from the household activities was unacceptable.

However with the changing times and increasing expenses, it became very difficult to depend on only one member of the family for the financial resources. Hence, women started working and tried to reduce the financial burden. That time it was more of a compulsion rather than a choice. But as the time progressed, women not only proved to be good at work but also started giving a tough competition to the males. In today’s time, a working woman has become a common phenomenon. On one hand, as the women are progressing well in the professional world, the challenges are also increasing. With dual career couples, nuclear families, extensive work pressure it becomes all together more difficult to maintain adequate balance between family and career (Aryee et al, 2005).

IT sector which employees’ big chunk of women face a major problem of providing adequate work life balance to them. Long working hours, late night shifts, project deadlines etc has a strong impact on the family life. In such situations, the biggest support for a woman is her family. If she is single then the encouragement from parents, siblings, relatives can be a great motivating factor. Support from spouse, children, parents, in laws can prove to be a great help for a married working women (Marcinkus et al, 2007). The role of husband in such situation is very crucial. He can provide his support by sharing the household responsibilities with his wife. Domestic help or sometimes the support of parents/in laws can also prove to be of great help (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011).

If the family is supportive, women can achieve a great high in her career path. She can not only make her family proud but also share a great hand of support to her spouse, parents in case of need.

### c) Social Support

The progress of a society/nation is not only measured by its financial status or economic progress but by the respect shown by the male citizens towards the females of the country. If the women of a country are not educated, qualified or independent then the growth of society remains stagnant. As the society is incomplete without females, so is a woman incomplete without the support of her society. She cannot achieve success if the society around her is not supportive.

In ancient India, the status of female was miserable. Problems like illiteracy, child marriage, dowry etc predominantly existed in the society. Girls were not allowed to step out of the house and walk around freely. They were married at a very early age and were considered only a source to take care of the family and bear children. (Jain, 2012).

During the pre-independence era, a lot many initiatives were taken by the social and religious reformers in order to educate the females and for the upliftment in the status of women (Mishra, 1994). Apart from that some of the welfare measure schemes were also introduced like Mahila Samridhhi Yojana (1993), Indira Mahila Yojana (1995) etc for improving the overall condition of women in the society (Dash, 2004).

In later years, the term “women empowerment” gained a lot of focus in the Indian society. It majorly focused on self-empowerment i.e. the right to make choices, take decisions etc (Pujari, 2012; Dubey, 2013). Various social reforms, legislations were initiated to help in improving the condition of women over the years.

Even though, our country has progressed a lot in the past few years, problems like gender differentiation, discrimination still exists. Women still experience discrimination in the society and at the workplace. They are restricted from doing certain work even if they desire to. They are still looked upon as a weaker section in the society and hence restrictions are imposed upon them especially after marriage or having children.

Now is the time, when enough measures should be taken not only to support the women who are already working but also encourage and motivate the others who wish to get education and make a good career. Instead of presuming or restricting the work of women, the choice or decision should be left on them. This will not only motivate them but also give a sense of freedom and accomplishment.

## 6. Final Outcome

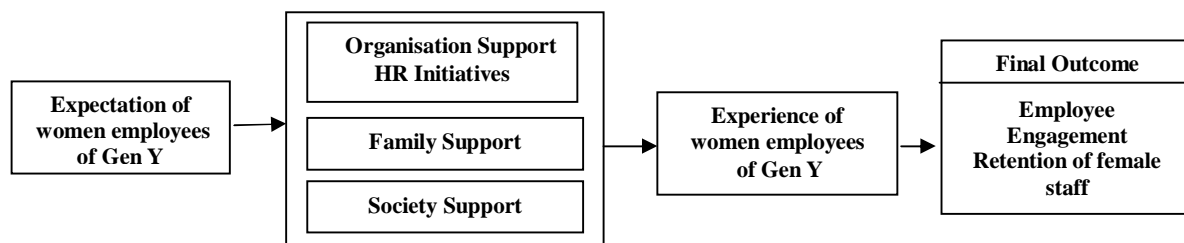
When we say that women of the current generation have become more independent the reality says that the dependency has actually increased like ever before. Today women have become capable enough to take multi-tasking challenges but it becomes very difficult to achieve all this without the support of everyone which includes family members, colleagues, managers and most importantly the society. All the three supporting factors are equally important and help in bridging the gap between the expectations and experiences of women. If the gap between the expectations and experiences are narrowed down, it will ultimately help in keeping the women employees much engaged, motivated and satisfied. This will help the organisation in achieving the objective of engaging the women employees and at the same time ensuring their retention in the company.

Engaging the employees and especially the youth generation has always been a difficult task for the company. If the goal of keeping the employees engaged is achieved it will ultimately keep the employees motivated and control the attrition.

## 7. Conceptual Framework: Linkage between Expectation and Experience of Gen Y women Employees

In an attempt to address the above mentioned concepts, a conceptual framework has been developed which includes the following components:

- Expectation of Gen Y women employees
- Experience of Gen Y women employees
- Factors supporting: Organisation, Family and Society
- Final Outcome: Employee Engagement, Retention of Female Staff



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework to Understand the Expectation and Experience and How to Bridge the Gap between them

With the help of the conceptual framework model and by understanding the concepts/components in detail, it can be interpreted that many a times the expectation and experience of a person in real doesn't match and a gap does exist between the two. However, with a hand of support from the organisation, family and the society can help in bridging the gap between these two components. The HR initiatives which are shown as a sub-component of the organisation can help in ensuring that

some of the best practices are followed in the organisation to support from the female staff. Ultimately when the experiences starts meeting the expectation can prove to be a great motivating factor. This may help in ensuring the employee engagement and the retention of the female staff.

## 8. Conclusion

With an increasing number of the young female talent available in the labour market, organisations needs to take a pause for a while and understand difference between the basic attitude, thinking and perception of the Gen Y with the previous ones. With the changing times, there is a huge change in the overall perception and attitude and so in the demands. Women of today are not ready to make compromises in their career so easily. They do not want to take the responsibility of managing the family alone and expect the support, co-operation from everyone. In the organisation as well, they have their own expectations and are ready to work only on their own conditions. With the increasing expectation, the job of HR has also increased. They should try to understand in detail what the expectation of the young generation women is and what is the reason for that. Some revision in the policies, programmes, initiatives should also be made as per the need of time. Things like social media, digital networking etc can be used as a strong engagement tool. Further improvements can be made so that the cases of discrimination or differentiation can be avoided.

We hope that the literature presented will help in better understanding the Gen Y female population which has not been explored in detail till now. It will also help in determining whether the current policies in the organisation are helpful or needs to be further improved. However, the research is limited to being an eye opener in understanding the female employees of Gen Y. It has further scope of understanding the youth female generations in different context and the overall impact not only on the organisation but also the family and society in particular. Further research can be conducted both in the local or global context to understand the further impact of these expectation of youth sector in the society like: delay of marriage, increasing stress, ignorance towards family especially children etc. And how organisations can prepare themselves in a better manner in order to engage this generation and the coming generations.

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