



# Social Media Distractions Affect Traits Differently Across Generations

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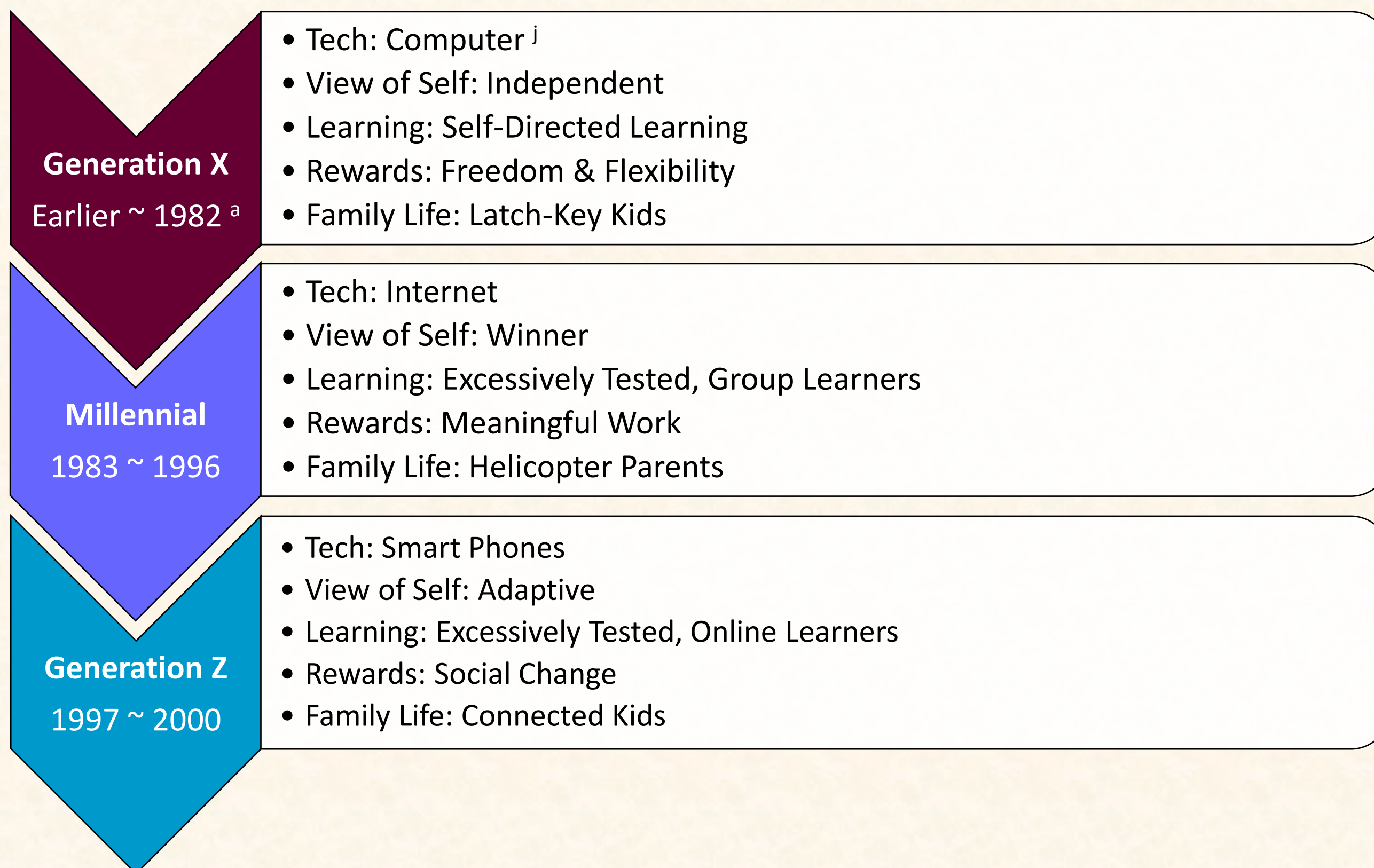


## Abstract

From classrooms to breakrooms, meetings between people have changed. Instant and unscheduled, social calls intrude virtually anywhere. In undergraduate students, Generation Z appears to be the most impacted by the demands of a digital social life. From a self-report survey of modified trait scales (i.e., subjective happiness, grit, academic entitlement, fixed mindset, and narcissism) and distractions caused by social media, this study examined the effects and relationships between traits and social media use of 1,835 students, across generations. Significant relationships were found between social media distractions and all traits. Compared to Generation X, Generation Z scored the lowest levels of subjective happiness and grit, and the highest levels of narcissism, academic entitlement, and fixed mindset. Furthermore, as students became more distracted by social media, they lost academic success traits, and gained academic frustration traits. To best prepare undergraduates for success in academia, methods for navigating digital interactions should be introduced to incoming students. Additionally, mentoring programs could connect students from different generations, potentially restoring lost traits as students work together to model their strengths in an arrangement between equals.

## Background

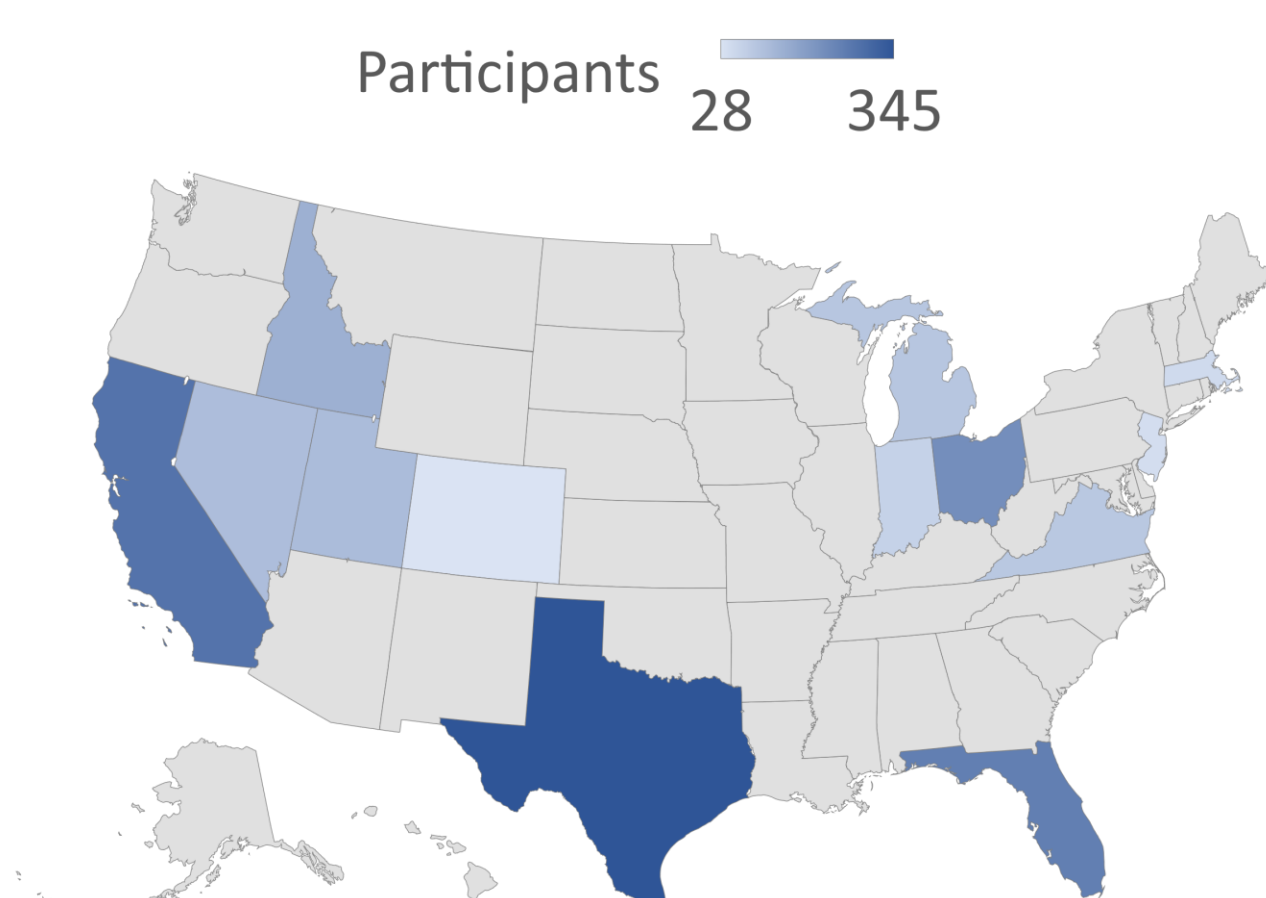
- Generational differences have been observed in an academic setting<sup>1n</sup>
- Extrinsic reasons for attending college since 1990s; extrinsic values inspire insecurity and social comparison<sup>l</sup>
- Students turn to social networks to restore academic confidence, which is important for success<sup>h</sup>
- Student hyperconnectivity to social media degrades focus and academic performance<sup>b k</sup>
- Traits that influence academic performance:
  - Fixed Mindset:** Belief that one's intellect has a fixed capacity<sup>d</sup>
  - Academic Entitlement:** Demanding attitudes, high grades expected for minimal effort<sup>f</sup>
  - Grit:** Long-term motivation in pursuit of meaningful goals<sup>c</sup>
  - Narcissism:** insatiable ego, utilize self-deception and aggression in pursuit of self-promotion<sup>g</sup>
  - Subjective Happiness:** General evaluation of one's happiness<sup>i</sup>



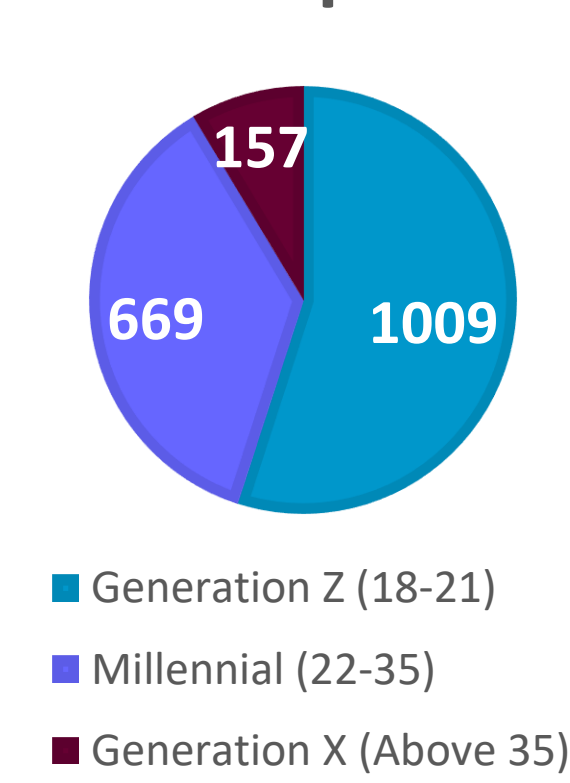
## Method

Participants: 1,835 undergraduate students

### College Locations Represented in Data



### Generation of Participants



Measures: Online survey assembled by the Psi Beta chapter of Blinn College

### Modified scales included in survey:

Fixed Mindset<sup>d</sup>, Academic Entitlement<sup>f</sup>, Grit<sup>c</sup>, Narcissism<sup>g</sup>, Subjective Happiness<sup>i</sup>

### Social media question focused on for this study:

How much do you think social media affects your study habits?

## Results

**H<sub>1</sub>1:** Different levels of fixed mindset occur between generations as study habits become more distracted by social media.

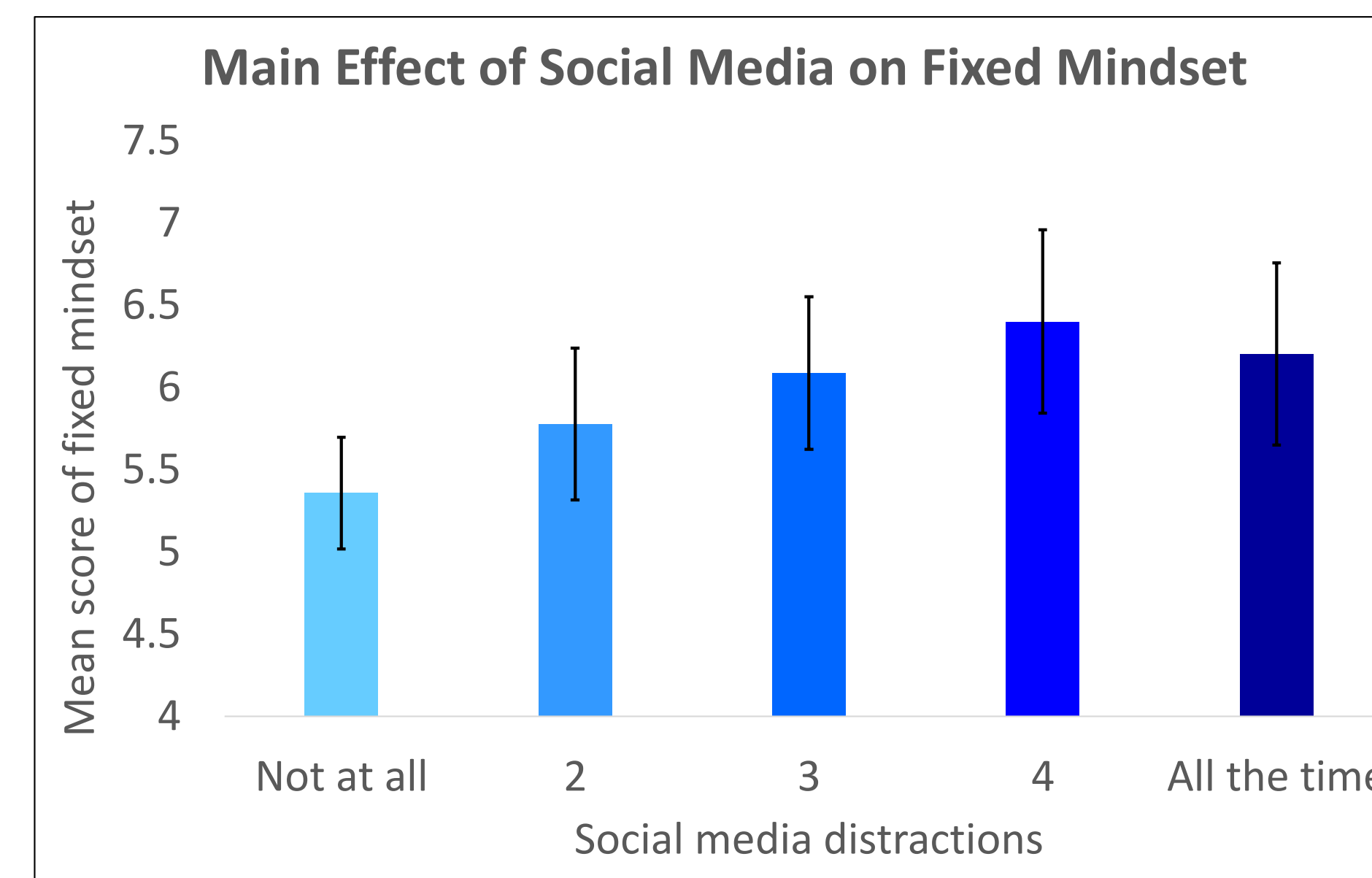


Figure 1.  $N = 1,835; p = .014; \eta^2 = .01$

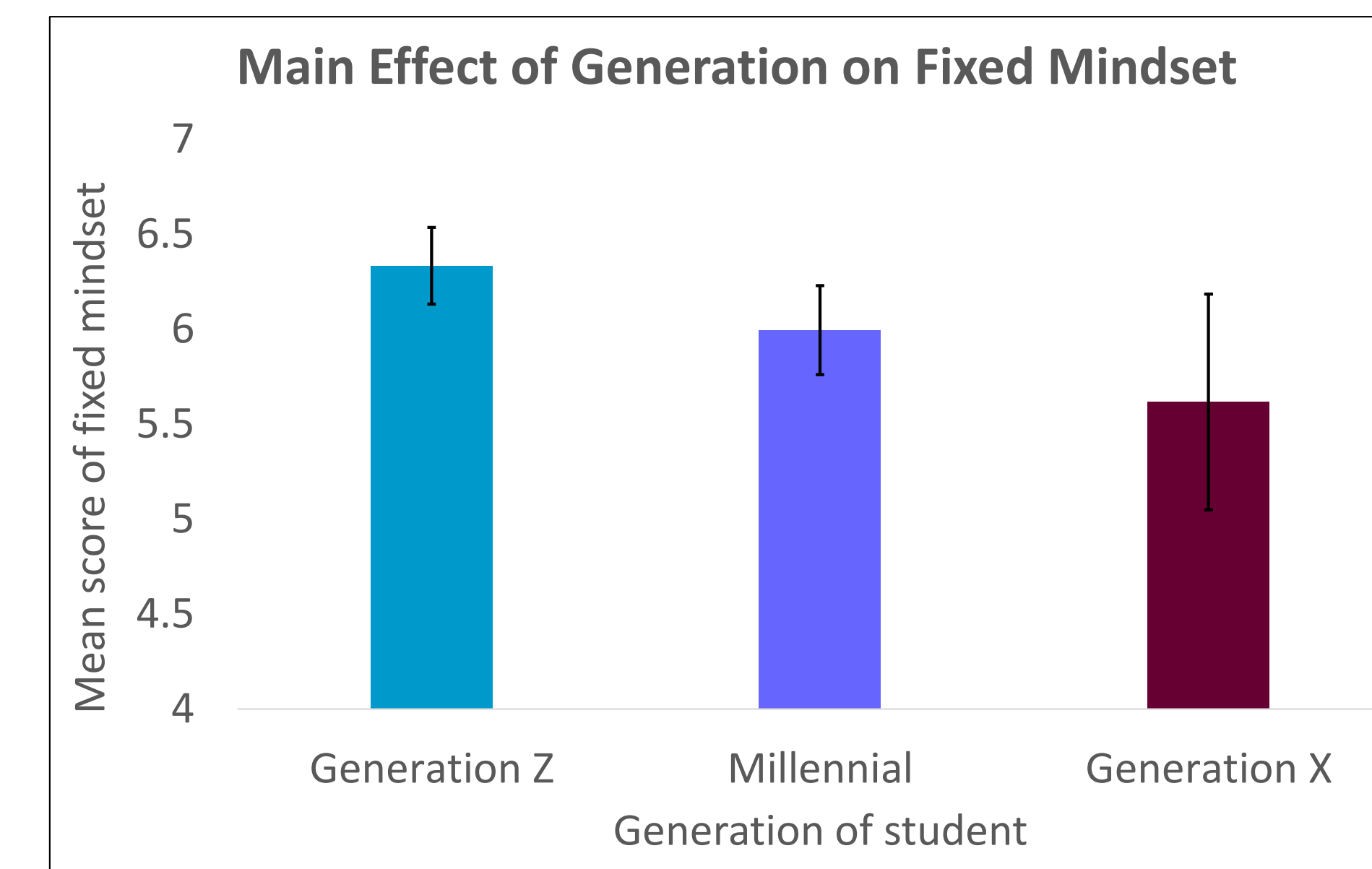


Figure 2.  $N = 1,835; p = .014; \eta^2 = .01$

**H<sub>2</sub>2:** Different levels of academic entitlement occur between generations as study habits become more distracted by social media.

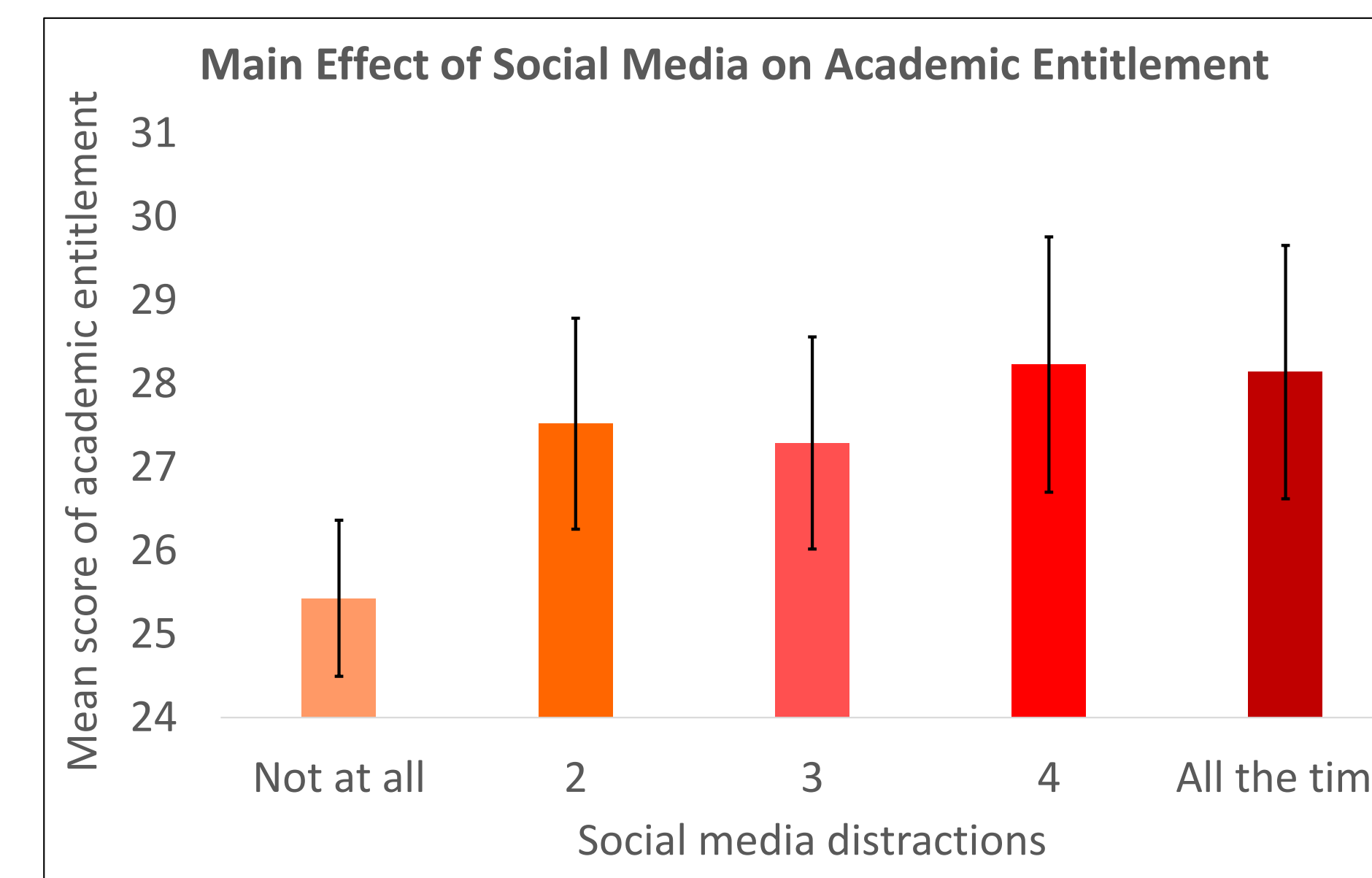


Figure 3.  $N = 1,835; p = .002; \eta^2 = .01$

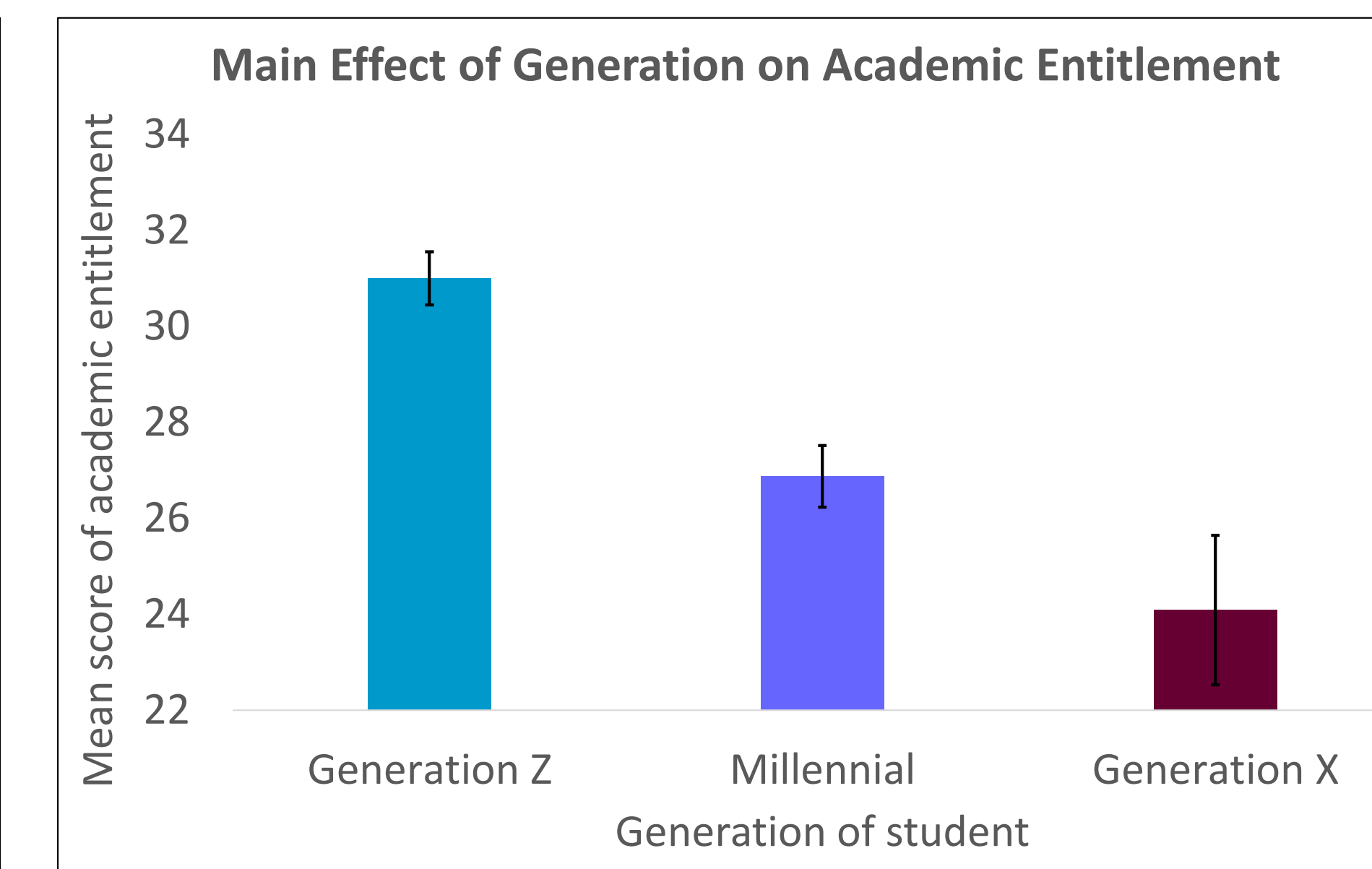


Figure 4.  $N = 1,835; p < .001; \eta^2 = .07$

**H<sub>3</sub>3:** Different levels of grit occur between generations as study habits become more distracted by social media.

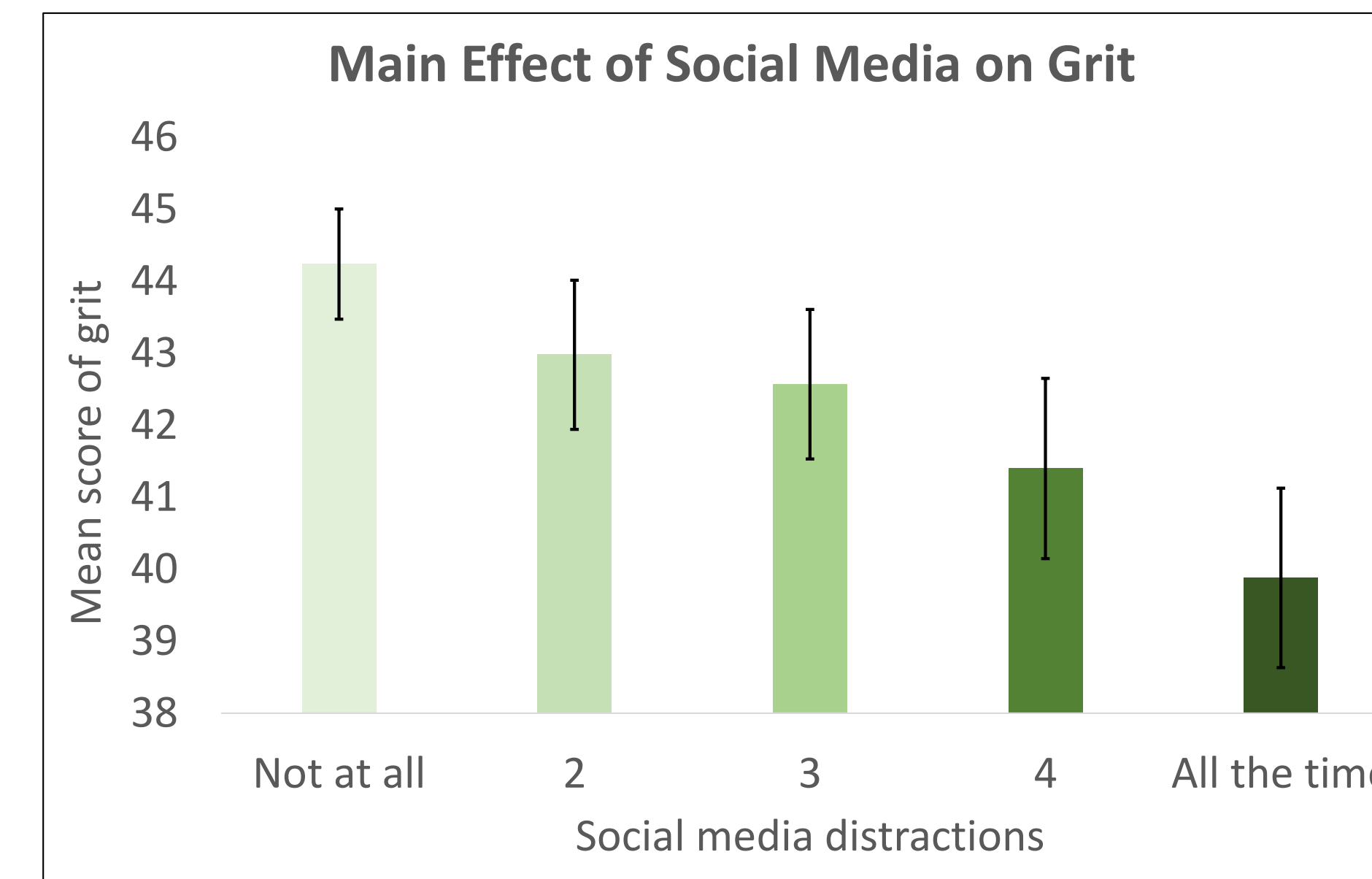


Figure 5.  $N = 1,835; p < .001; \eta^2 = .02$

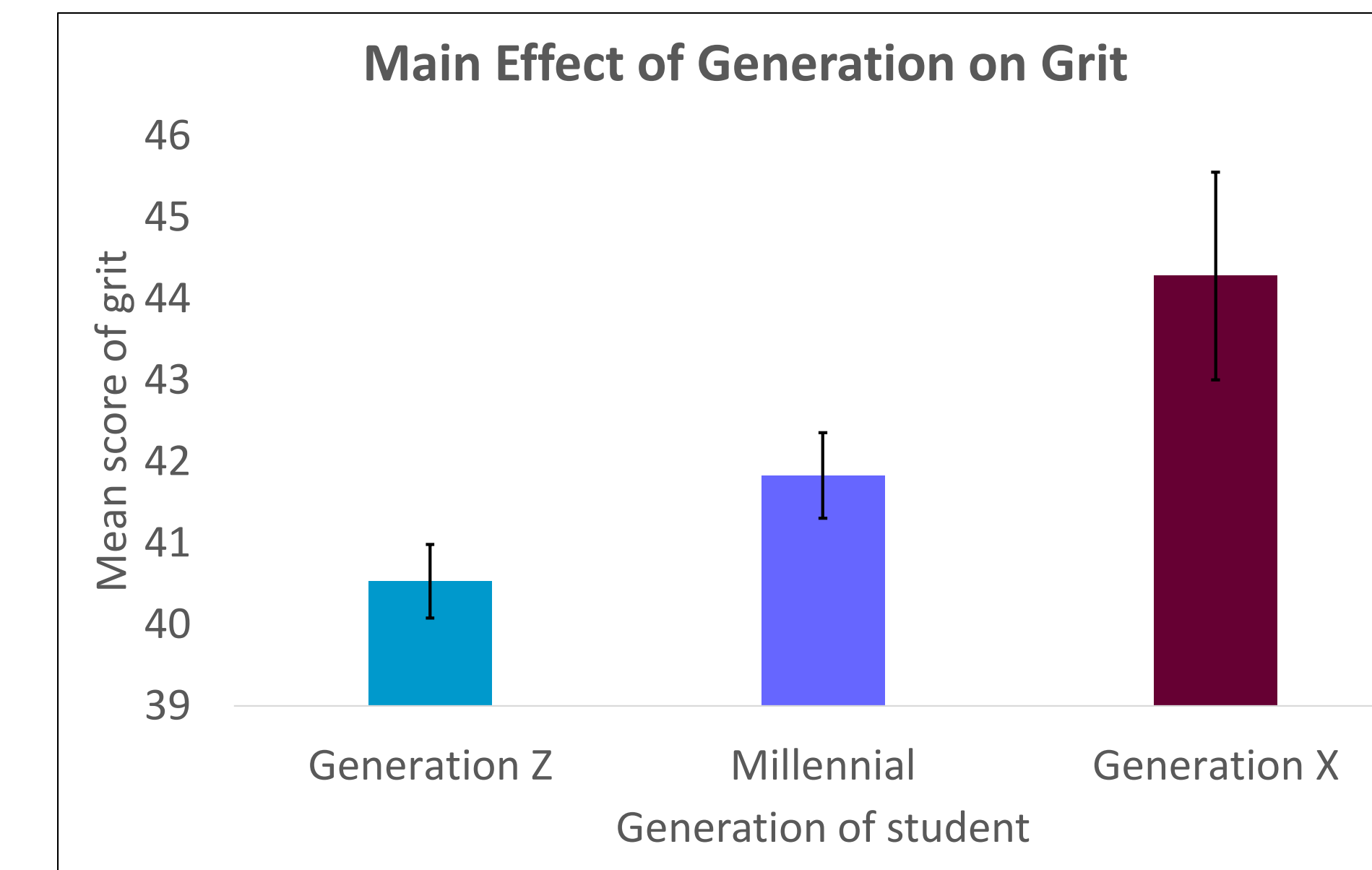


Figure 6.  $N = 1,835; p < .001; \eta^2 = .02$

**H<sub>4</sub>4:** Different levels of narcissism occur between generations as study habits become more distracted by social media.

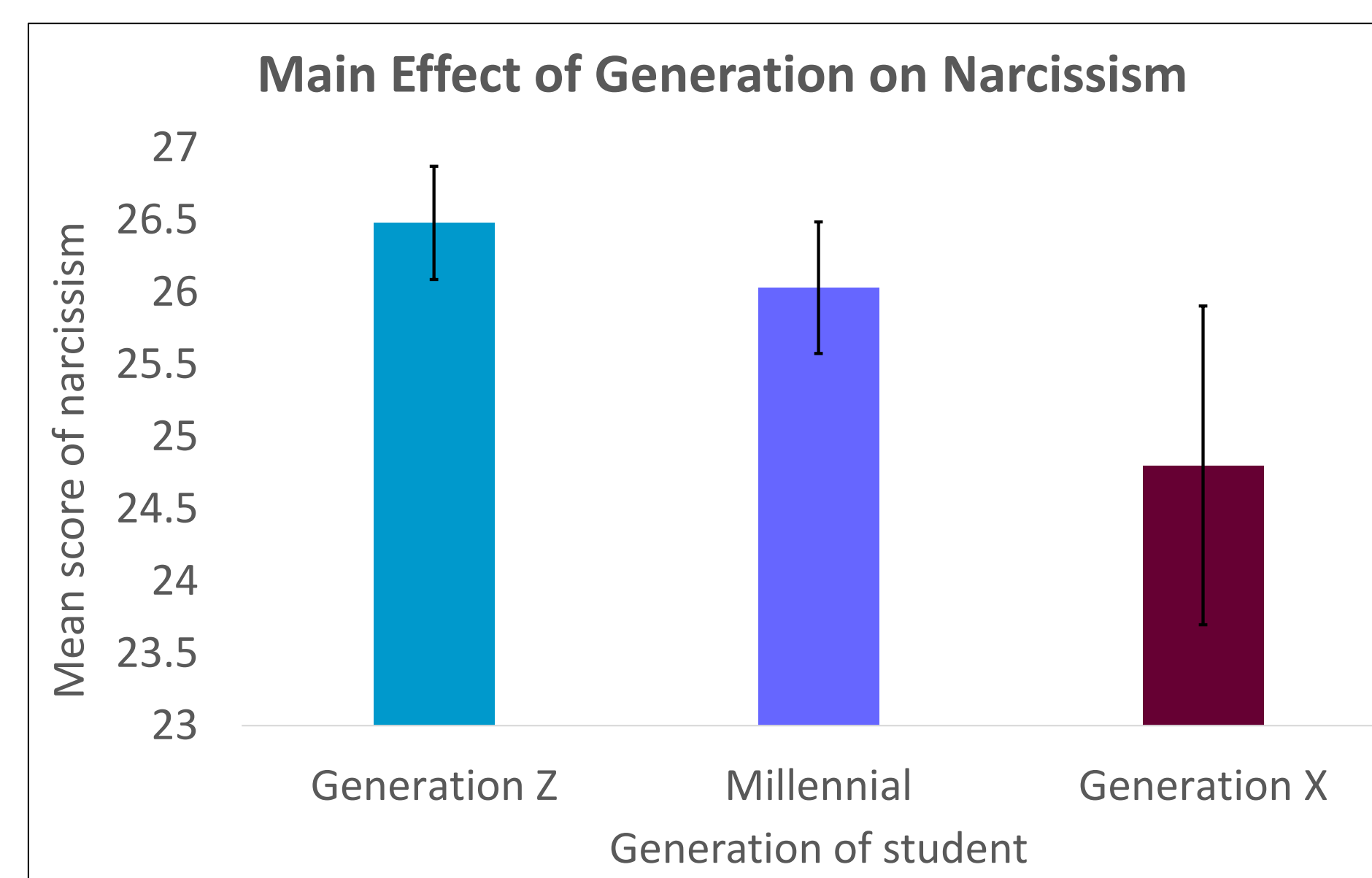


Figure 7.  $N = 1,835; p = .011; \eta^2 = .01$

**H<sub>5</sub>5:** Different levels of subjective happiness occur between generations as study habits become more distracted by social media.

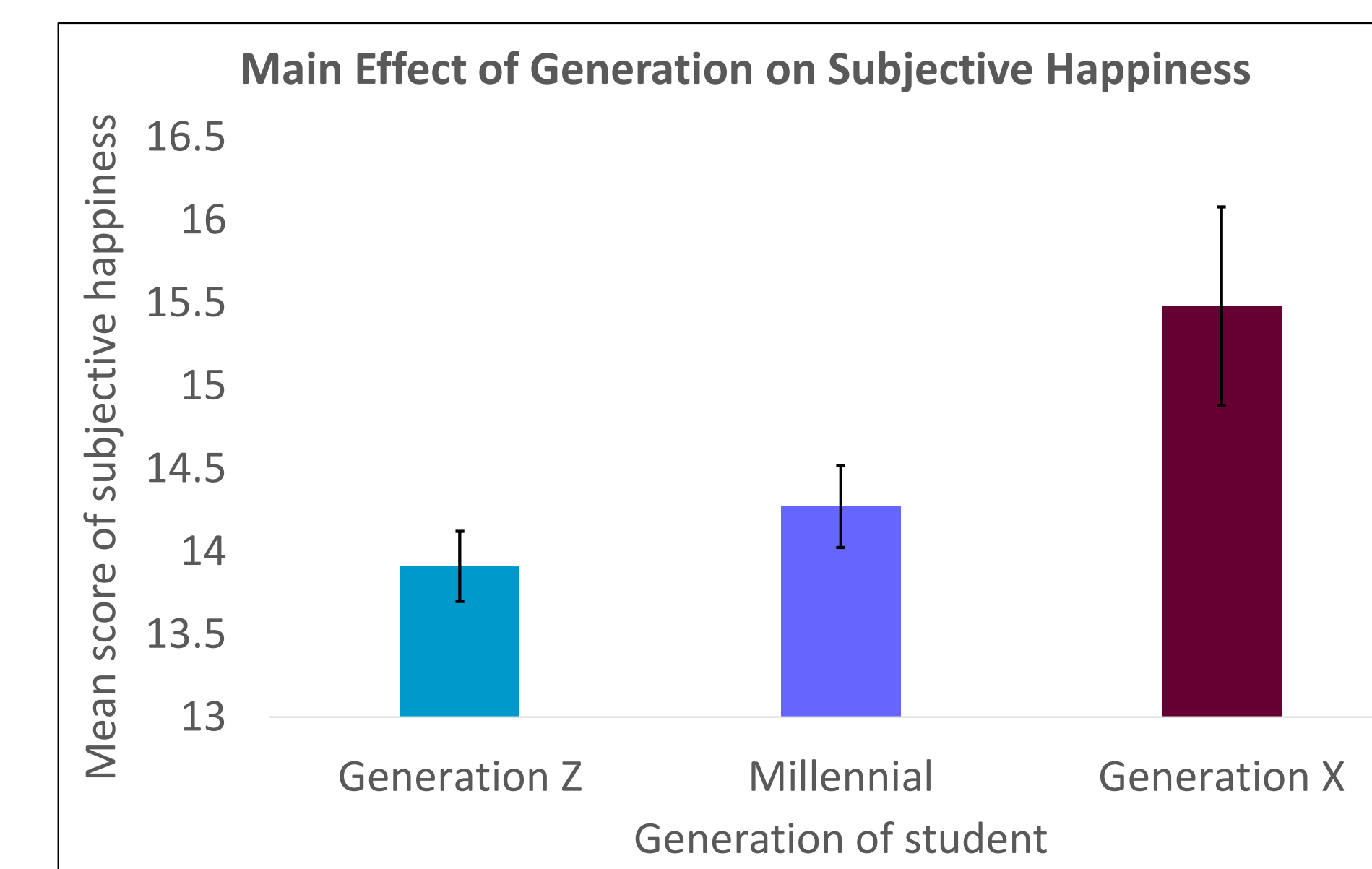


Figure 8.  $N = 1,835; p < .001; \eta^2 = .01$

## Discussion

- Social media:** More = more fixed mindset, more entitlement & less grit
- Fixed Mindset:** Higher levels in Millennials and Generation Z may be explained by the trend of increased externality in locus of control<sup>n</sup>
- Academic Entitlement:** Linked to narcissism and parental/social pressure<sup>f</sup>, which have previously been identified as factors for Millennials and Generation Z<sup>l</sup>
- Grit:** The self-directed learning style of Generation X<sup>j</sup> may account for higher grit, whereas Millennials and Generation Z were test oriented<sup>l</sup>, which may create emphasis on short-term goals
- Narcissism:** Socially destructive and more common in Millennials and Generation Z, yet also linked to positive self-esteem—which Generation X could use more of<sup>m</sup>
- Subjective Happiness:** Decrease observed in Millennials and Generation Z may be explained by increased cynicism which researchers suggest may be linked to premature exposure to the adult world<sup>n</sup>, perhaps ushered in via internet and exacerbated by mobile devices and wireless access
- Take Home Message:** Counsel students to manage attention, balance studies and build coping strategies that promote learning

## Limitations

- Scales were modified—lost accuracy as tools of trait measurement
- Questions poorly designed for age and social media
- Self-reports without supporting/physiological data should be taken lightly<sup>e</sup>

## Future Directions

- Design questionnaire that holds to established scales and asks targeted questions that can provide more focused answers (e.g., *Select social media platform(s) you have active accounts with; how many profiles do you have—including anonymous/fake profiles?*)
- Measure physiological stress response, during social media use, in students who report social media helps them cope with academic stress; collect surveys on mood before and after to contrast with stress data.

## References

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