Abstract
From classrooms to breakrooms, meetings between people have changed. Instant and unscheduled, social calls intrude virtually anywhere. In undergraduate settings, 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 distractions 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.

Results

H2: Different levels of academic entitlement occur between generations as study habits become more distracted by social media.


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Discussion

• Social media: More = more fixed mindset, more entitlement & less grit
• Academic Entitlement: Higher levels in Millennials and Generation Z may be explained by the trend of increased externality in local life scale
• Grit: The self-directed learning style of Generation X may account for higher grit, whereas Millennials and Generation Z were test oriented, which may create emphasis on short-term goals
• View of Self: Adaptive Socially destructive and more common in Millennials and Generation Z, yet also linked to positive self-esteem—where Generation X could use more of
• 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, perhaps ushered in via internet and exacerbated by mobile devices and wireless access

Limitations

• Scales were modified—lost accuracy as tools of trait measurement
• Questions poorly designed for age and social media

Method

Participants: 1,835 undergraduate students

College Locations Represented in Data
Participants 28 345

Generation of Students

Generation Z 1997 – 2000

Millenials 1983 – 1996

Generation X Earlier ~ 1982

• Technology: Computer
• View of Self: Independent
• Learning: Self-Directed Learning
• Rewards: Freedom & Flexibility
• Family Life: Latch-Key Kids

• Technology: Internet
• View of Self: Winner
• Learning: Excessively Tested, Group Learners
• Rewards: Meaningful Work
• Family Life: Helicopter Parents

• Technology: Smart Phones
• View of Self: Adaptive
• Learning: Excessively Tested, Online Learners
• Rewards: Social Change
• Family Life: Connected Kids

• Technology: Computer
• View of Self: Independent
• Learning: Self-Directed Learning
• Rewards: Freedom & Flexibility
• Family Life: Latch-Key Kids

References

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