ZILLENIAL MICROGENERATION: HYBRID TRAITS, DIGITAL BEHAVIOR, AND GENERATIONAL BOUNDARIES

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Abstract

This narrative review explores the emerging concept of Zillennials, a microgeneration situated between Millennials and Generation Z, by synthesizing existing literature on their defining traits, values, and sociocultural behaviors. The study aims to clarify the characteristics that distinguish Zillennials from their parent generations, addressing the ambiguity surrounding generational boundaries. Using Google Scholar as the primary database, 434 initial sources were screened, resulting in 22 relevant studies. Text Data Mining and thematic analysis were employed to extract recurring themes and construct a coherent generational profile. Findings reveal that Zillennials exhibit hybrid traits, such as being digitally fluent yet cautious adopters of new technologies, valuing work-life balance and flexible arrangements, and demonstrating strong social awareness and ethical consumer behavior. Their communication style favors structured feedback and digital interaction, while their learning preferences lean toward independent, tech-supported methods. As a generational bridge, Zillennials blend the pragmatism of Millennials with the innovation of Gen Z, making them uniquely positioned to mediate cultural and technological shifts. By synthesizing fragmented insights across disciplines, this study provides a consolidated generational profile that advances our understanding of microgenerational identity and its implications. The study concludes that Zillennials should be recognized as a distinct cohort in educational, organizational, and societal contexts. Future researchers are recommended to explore their experiences across diverse settings and examine their responses to rapid digital and economic changes.

Keywords: micro-generation, narrative review, generational identity, literature review

INTRODUCTION

Generational cohorts serve as a critical framework for interpreting broad social, technological, and cultural shifts (Schlinck, 2023). Among these, "Zillennials" have emerged as a microgeneration situated between Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z, representing individuals born roughly between 1992 and 2012 (Widawska, 2021; Kholikin & Holivil, 2025; Moffett et al., 2023; Jelača & Golubović, 2024; Ridzky & Arsyianti, 2024). This cusp generation exhibits unique hybrid traits and cultural norms that distinguish them from the broader parent cohorts, shaped by their experiences during the transition from an analog to a fully digital world (Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025; Moffett et al., 2023; Schlinck, 2023).

The concept of generational categorization is grounded in generational theory, popularized by Karl Mannheim and formalized by researchers like Strauss and Howe (Schlinck, 2023; Widawska, 2021). This theory posits that cohorts born within similar timeframes experience common social, historical, and environmental events, resulting in a shared collective worldview or "peer personality" (Schlinck, 2023). Although precise boundaries are debated, generational frameworks help explain patterns in attitudes, values, and behaviors across social groups (Widawska, 2021).

Zillennials, as a transitional cohort, combine characteristics of both Millennials and Generation Z. They inherit some values, behaviors, and work preferences from Millennials while exhibiting digital nativity, adaptability, and technological fluency typical of Generation Z (Bodrick et al., 2025; Kholikin & Holivil, 2025; Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025; Moffett et al., 2023). This unique positioning has led to increasing attention in academic research, marketing, and media due to their hybrid cultural identity and growing sociocultural influence (Rawat & Rawat, 2022; Moffett et al., 2023).

Despite growing interest, the scholarly study of Zillennials remains limited. Most research subsumes them under Millennials or Generation Z, or focuses on narrow aspects such as consumer behavior, digital habits, or social media engagement (Widawska, 2021; Moffett et al., 2023; Fauziah & Subkati, 2023; Izza et al., 2023). Consequently, their hybrid traits, sociocultural identity, and generational distinctiveness are underexplored, and there is limited consensus regarding their defining characteristics or generational boundaries (Widawska, 2021; Bodrick et al., 2025; Schlinck, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Zillennials are increasingly recognized as a microgeneration situated at the cusp between Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z, often defined as the oldest members of Generation Z and the youngest of Millennials (Moffett et al., 2023; Jelača & Golubović, 2024; Schlinck, 2023). This positioning results in hybrid generational traits that blend analog and digital experiences, creating transitional behaviors that negotiate both worlds (Taylor, 2023; Bengtsson & Johansson, 2018; Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025). While Millennials are generally characterized by their formative experiences with pre-digital technologies and an emphasis on structured work ethics (Bodrick et al., 2025; Jelača & Golubović, 2024), Generation Z has been described as fully digital-native, highly adaptable, and socially conscious (Kholikin & Holivil, 2025; Schlinck, 2023). Zillennials, by contrast, combine aspects of both, exhibiting digital fluency alongside transitional social values that reflect exposure to major socio-historical events, such as the post-9/11 world, the 2008 global financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Schlinck, 2023; Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025).

Culturally, Zillennials emphasize individuality, diversity, and inclusion, while also demonstrating heightened awareness of social and environmental issues (Bodrick et al., 2025; Rahma & Wempi, 2023; Kholikin & Holivil, 2025). Rawat and Rawat (2022) similarly highlight this generation's growing influence across media and society, noting that their hybrid characteristics position them uniquely in shaping social and cultural trends. Compared to Millennials' focus on stability and Generation Z's rapid adoption of digital tools, Zillennials negotiate these influences, often leveraging technological fluency while maintaining some attachment to pre-digital social norms (Bodrick et al., 2025; Moffett et al., 2023; Saputra & Hadad, 2024). Their formative environment also spans key technological transitions, having grown up witnessing the shift from analog to

digital communication platforms (Ridzky & Arsyianti, 2024; Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025; Moffett et al., 2023).

Technological adeptness is a defining feature of Zillennials. They are highly active on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter, which they use for communication, information gathering, and cultural engagement (Fauziah & Subkati, 2023; Izza et al., 2023; Kholikin & Holivil, 2025; Schlinck, 2023). In this sense, Zillennials bridge the analog familiarity of Millennials with the fully digital environment of Generation Z, demonstrating an integration of technological fluency and transitional cultural norms (Moffett et al., 2023; Bodrick et al., 2025). Scholars such as Saputra and Hadad (2024) further argue that this unique combination of skills and perspectives enables Zillennials to navigate both traditional and digital spaces, distinguishing them from their parent generations.

Despite increasing visibility, Zillennials are not formally recognized as a distinct generation (Widawska, 2021). The categorization of generations itself faces persistent critiques, including arbitrary cutoff dates, limited empirical validation, and insufficient evidence supporting behavioral distinctions between cohorts (Bodrick et al., 2025; Schlinck, 2023; Moffett et al., 2023). Consequently, cusp generations such as Zillennials experience conceptual ambiguity, often exhibiting overlapping traits from both Millennials and Generation Z (Widawska, 2021; Moffett et al., 2023). This hybridization presents both challenges and opportunities for research. For instance, while some studies emphasize Zillennials' digital fluency and adaptability, others note their retention of Millennial values, such as work ethic, social preferences, and cultural norms (Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025; Moffett et al., 2023).

Moreover, Zillennials' identity is shaped by exposure to global events and socio-cultural phenomena, including discussions of climate change, social justice, and media representations of generational differences (Kholikin & Holivil, 2025; Widawska, 2021). The popular discourse, particularly on platforms like TikTok, has amplified the visibility of Zillennials, allowing individuals who feel "in-between" to self-identify and articulate their distinct experiences (Widawska, 2021; Jelača & Golubović, 2024). This highlights the fluid and socially constructed nature of generational identity, underscoring the importance of examining microgenerations through a lens that accounts for both digital behavior and socio-cultural positioning.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a narrative review approach, which aims to provide a broad, critical synthesis of existing research on a specific topic. Unlike systematic reviews, which follow strict inclusion criteria and employ quantitative analysis, a narrative review enables an integrative and interpretive examination of diverse studies (Hanze University of Applied Sciences Library, 2024). It is particularly suited for emerging or underexplored topics, such as the Zillennial microgeneration, where available literature is still limited and conceptually varied (Grant & Booth, 2022).

Moreover, Google Scholar was used as the primary database for literature retrieval due to its comprehensive coverage of interdisciplinary academic sources, including journal articles, conference proceedings, and institutional publications (Haddaway et al., 2015). The keyword "Zillennials" was entered as the main search term, which initially yielded 434 results. Each entry was manually screened based on relevance and accessibility, resulting in a final selection of 22 sources. Studies were excluded if full-

text files were unavailable or if the content was unrelated to generational identity, behavior, or socio-cultural characteristics.

The researchers applied Text Data Mining to extract recurring concepts, terminologies, and descriptors related to Zillennials from the selected sources. Text-mining methods such as keyword extraction and topic modeling are increasingly applied in literature reviews of large text corpora (Talib et al., 2016). Following this, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify and group emerging themes, integrating discrete findings into broader conceptual categories. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) across data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process enabled the construction of a coherent narrative profile of the Zillennial microgeneration, highlighting their distinctive traits, values, and implications in contemporary research and practice.

DISCUSSION

Defining Traits of Zillenial Microgeneration

The Zillennial microgeneration, positioned at the boundary of Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z, is defined by a unique synthesis of characteristics derived from its transitional existence (Widawska, 2021; Moffett et al., 2023).

Technology Engagement and Digital Behavior

While Zillennials demonstrate high digital fluency and are digitally engaged in most aspects of their lives, studies highlight a nuance in how they engage with technology. They are confirmed to be "gadget-lovers" and exhibit high degrees of personal innovativeness and technological opinion leadership, which often leads to influencing others' opinions about technology (Rawat & Rawat, 2022). However, unexpectedly, some research found that Zillennials do not display high technological innovativeness, meaning they are less likely to be the first to adopt new technology (Rawat & Rawat, 2022). At the same time, research characterizes them as "digital-first" rather than "digital-only," indicating a strong preference for reliable, convenient tools rather than the newest, untested innovation (Rozaki et al., 2025).

Moreover, this microgeneration frequently utilizes digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter for communication, activism, and information seeking (Fauziah & Subkati, 2023; Kholikin & Holivil, 2025). They are not always early adopters of new technologies, showing a cautious and selective approach to innovation. Their role as opinion leaders in tech is balanced by a preference for practicality and reliability over novelty.

Work Preferences and Career Expectations

Zillennials who are currently in their late 20s or Early 30s continue to shape workplace expectations in various ways. The most notable aspect is that they highly prioritize work-life balance and desire flexible work arrangements, as well as the ability to set personal boundaries, over traditional 9-to-5 structures (Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025; Moffett et al., 2023; Bodrick et al., 2025). When organizations provide such flexibility, Zillennial employees report higher job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, and greater engagement (Wijayadi & Yuniasanti, 2025).

Employees who effectively manage their personal and professional responsibilities tend to perform better at work (Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025). They are

highly focused on career development, expecting substantial training, personal growth opportunities, and rapid advancement (Moffett et al., 2023; Schlinck, 2023). Business stakeholders perceive this generation as having a high degree of self-efficacy (self-belief) that is often misaligned with their experience or business acumen, leading to perceived unrealistic expectations regarding salary, status, and quick promotion (Moffett et al., 2023).

Social Values and Civic Engagement

Growing up with high social and environmental awareness, Zillennials are highly aware of social and environmental issues (Kholikin & Holivil, 2025; Schlinck, 2023). They are politically engaged, focusing on causes such as combating racism, addressing economic inequality, and mitigating climate change (Schlinck, 2023; Kholikin & Holivil, 2025). This generation expects institutions to be diverse and attentive to inclusion (Schlinck, 2023; Bodrick et al., 2025). A notable characteristic of Zillenials is their advocacy for change, which is often communicated on social media platforms (Fauziah & Subkati, 2023; Kholikin & Holivil, 2025).

Their social participation and awareness are effectively fostered through digital programs like Voluntrip, which invites them to participate in social activities in a "fun" way, and where the involvement of public figures enhances interest and trust in the programs (Rahma & Wempi, 2023). In the context of the halal industry, Millennials and Zillennials dominate conversations on Twitter, exhibiting a predominantly positive sentiment (71%) (Izza et al., 2023; Afrilia et al., 2025).

Communication and Learning Styles

Different generations have their own distinct qualities and use language in unique ways for communication. It is commonly observed that Zillennials highly value frequent, individualized, and structured feedback, preferring this form of formative assessment to traditional summative assessments (Nurhikmah N, 2024). They prefer the efficiency of modern communication methods but struggle with formal communication (like email), which may be misinterpreted as unprofessional or disrespectful (Prayetno, 2024). One study of the Zillennial generation also reveals that 57.50% of Zillenials experience a high rate of communication anxiety and public speaking fear, which often leads them to prefer virtual or written communication over face-to-face interaction (Wulandari & Yulianti, 2024). In educational settings, they also prefer to work independently before sharing, using tools like Google Docs to "work alone together," contrasting with the traditional emphasis on team collaboration (Schlinck, 2023).

Consumer Behavior and Ethical Choices

The consumer behavior of the Zillennial microgeneration reflects their hybrid generational identity, characterized by the blending of digital convenience, ethical awareness, and value-driven decision-making. Their purchasing patterns reveal an emphasis on accessibility, personalization, and social responsibility, which are shaped by both technological fluency and evolving moral consciousness.

Moreover, Zillennials are deeply immersed in digital commerce, where convenience plays a central role in determining their purchasing intentions. They frequently engage in online transactions, including the purchase of preloved goods, valuing practicality and efficiency in their buying experiences (Naufal & Nelloh, 2021). Studies indicate that factors such as convenience, perceived usefulness, and ease of use

significantly affect individuals' intention to make financial contributions, including Zakat, Infak, and Alms (ZIS), through e-wallet platforms. In contrast, brand awareness plays a lesser role (Afrilia et al., 2025). Their digital engagement also exposes them to psychological influences, such as the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), which can heighten their propensity to invest in stocks and other emerging financial platforms (Ridzky & Arsyianti, 2024).

In terms of fashion and lifestyle, Zillennials tend to merge global and cultural influences to express individuality and identity. Exposed to both the analog past and the digital present, they draw from diverse sources to express their values, individuality, and personal story (Friedman, 2024). Evidence shows that within Muslim fashion consumption, for example, a balance is struck between modernity and modesty by integrating global fashion trends with Islamic values (Nurhikmah NIP, 2025). Their fashion consciousness is driven by a desire for uniqueness and is shaped by diverse sources of inspiration, including social media, mass media, and peer interaction (Ocktavia et al., 2024). Moreover, Halal awareness plays a pivotal role in influencing their purchasing interest and ultimate buying decisions, underscoring the moral and religious dimensions of their consumer choices (Putriana, 2024).

Sustainability also features prominently in Zillennials' consumption behavior. They exhibit a growing preference for environmentally responsible products and are willing to pay premium prices for sustainable goods (Bargavi, 2023). Social influence, particularly from peers and family, as well as government initiatives such as plastic bag bans, significantly affects their intention to engage in eco-friendly practices, including reducing plastic use (Solekah et al., 2024). However, increased environmental awareness alone does not always translate into behavioral change, as awareness does not necessarily predict the adoption of alternatives, such as cloth bags (Solekah et al., 2024). When selecting products such as disposable chai-flasks, Zillennials prioritize sustainability, favoring recyclable or bamboo materials that align with their eco-conscious values (Bargavi, 2023). Collectively, these patterns illustrate how the Zillennial microgeneration navigates consumption with a blend of digital engagement, ethical mindfulness, and environmental sensitivity.

Hybrid Identity Across Gen Z and Millennials

Zillennials share several defining traits with their generational neighbors. Like Gen Z, they are deeply immersed in digital technology, having grown up during the rise of social media and mobile connectivity (Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025; Bodrick et al., 2025). Their constant online presence fosters digital literacy and data privacy, as well as the ability to navigate multiple communication platforms effortlessly. At the same time, they uphold values often associated with both Millennials and Gen Z, such as diversity, inclusion, and a desire for work-life balance (Bodrick et al., 2025; Franksiska & Yuniawan, 2025; Tamphu, 2024). This alignment positions Zillennials as socially aware and empathetic individuals who value authenticity, equality, and flexible lifestyles.

Preferred Work Style and Collaboration Patterns

Zillennials are often viewed as a "generational bridge," capable of connecting Millennials and Gen Z within social and professional spaces. In workplaces, they facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange across age groups due to their balanced understanding of both traditional and digital work cultures (Moffett et al., 2023; Widawska, 2021).

However, unlike the commonly team-oriented Millennials, Zillennials tend to favor independent and intrapersonal work styles before engaging in group collaboration, reflecting a self-driven yet cooperative approach to productivity (Schlinck, 2023). They prefer to complete tasks individually and then contribute to collective efforts. This work style is supported by their use of digital tools, such as Google Docs, which enable them to "work alone together," blending autonomy with connectivity. Their ability to navigate both traditional and digital work cultures positions them as effective mediators in multigenerational teams.

Career Aspirations and Perceived Gaps

Zillennials exhibit high levels of self-efficacy and ambition, often expecting rapid career advancement, meaningful training, and opportunities for personal growth (Moffett et al., 2023). However, this confidence can sometimes be misaligned with their experience, leading to perceived gaps between expectations and workplace realities. Employers may perceive assertiveness as unrealistic, particularly in terms of salary, status, and timelines for promotions. Nonetheless, this drive reflects their desire to make impactful contributions and grow within dynamic professional environments.

Workplace Engagement and Commitment Trends

While Generation Z is often associated with "quiet quitting" (doing only the minimum job requirements) and minimal engagement, Zillennials show a greater tendency to exceed expectations and demonstrate reliability. Studies suggest that they are less susceptible to negative workplace stereotypes, such as being perceived as lazy. Zillenials are more likely to take initiative and seek feedback. Their hybrid identity enables them to balance the structured professionalism of Millennials with the flexibility and innovation of Gen Z, making them valuable contributors to evolving organizational cultures and often recognized as reliable and proactive (Moffett et al., 2023; Jelača & Golubović, 2024).

Hence, just based on this, Zillennials' blend of overlapping and unique traits underscores their role as a microgeneration that bridges cultural, technological, and attitudinal divides. Their adaptability and balanced worldview enable them to mediate between the values of preceding and succeeding generations, making them an important subject of study in contemporary generational research.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Zillennials stand out as a special group caught between two worlds, the pre-digital and digital eras. They possess the practicality and cautious outlook of Millennials, while also sharing the creativity and tech-savvy mindset of Gen Z. Digitally fluent yet cautious adopters, they navigate technology with both enthusiasm and discernment, using platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter not only for communication but also for activism and information seeking. In professional contexts, they value balance, flexibility, and growth opportunities, often exceeding expectations through reliability and initiative, even as their ambitions sometimes outpace experience. Their experiences growing up during major economic and technological changes have shaped them into realistic, goal-driven individuals who still value personal meaning and balance in life. Socially, they are deeply engaged with issues of justice, sustainability, and equality, translating their values into civic participation, consumer choices, and cultural expression.

Additionally, the findings suggest that schools, workplaces, and communities should treat Zillennials as a distinct generation, rather than grouping them with Millennials or Gen Z. Recognizing Zillennials as more than a transitional group is essential for schools, workplaces, and communities. Educators can design learning strategies that blend digital fluency with hands-on engagement, while employers can create pathways that strike a balance between rapid development and realistic expectations. Moreover, workplaces should design programs that help them grow professionally while supporting their need for flexibility and feedback. Civic and social institutions, in turn, can connect more effectively with this cohort by aligning their initiatives with their ethical commitments and digital habits, and by recognizing their values, such as social justice, environmental care, and equality. This recognition can help create more effective civic and social campaigns that resonate with their interests.

Since this research focused solely on the traits of Zillennials based on a synthesis of related studies, it is recommended that future researchers investigate Zillennials in various countries and settings to gain a deeper understanding of their habits, motivations, and challenges. Researchers could also explore how they handle stress, career changes, and relationships in a fast-paced digital world. By doing so, future studies can show how Zillennials, as a bridge generation, can influence the next era of work, education, and community life.

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