

## Are Generation Z More Open to Change than Millennials? Georgian Case

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### Annotation

*A value is a standard, a fundamental belief that guides individual behavior and decision-making (Schwartz, 1992). The person behaves according to these values both individually and in a group. The emergence of generations as a concept is associated with the idea that individuals who are born in the same historical period share the process of forming a system of values, attitudes, and worldviews (Mannheim, 1952). Using Schwartz's basic value theory (1992), this study analyzes the differences between millennials and Generation Z in four high-level value dimensions: Self-transcendence, Self-empowerment, Openness to change, and Conservation. 161 respondents participated in the quantitative research study. It was found that in Georgia, millennials and Generation Z differ in the value dimension such as Openness to Change.*

**Key terms:** Millennials; Generation Z; Self-transcendence; Self-empowerment; Openness to change, Conservation.

### Introduction

The study of intergenerational value shifts is becoming increasingly important in the modern social, economic, and cultural environment. Each generation is characterized by specific historical and social conditions that influence not only observable behavior, but also the inner values. Values are deeply connected with motivational principles which leads to regulating behavior and emotions. Thus, the study of intergenerational value differences allows us to see processes such as social change, cultural continuity and intergenerational dynamics from a broader perspective.

The present study was conducted in Georgia, a Post-Soviet country that has undergone significant political, economic, and cultural transformation over the past three decades. Georgia provides an important context for studying intergenerational differences, as millennials and Generation Z have been socialized in very different historical contexts. Millennials' childhood and adolescence coincide with the transition from Soviet rule to independence, which was characterized by economic instability, institutional collapse, and uncertainty about future goals. In contrast, Generation Z grew up in a relatively more stable, globalized and digital environment, more connected to Western cultural influences, social media, and pluralism. Such contrasting experiences make Georgia a particularly relevant country for examining how these two generations differ in terms of values.

Significant Generational shifts are revealed in different studies conducted in Georgia. One of the important changes is connected with the usage and trust of

media institutions. Generation Z is more relied on digital media than Millennials which reveals their different preferences. Newer Generation (18–34) mostly use platforms such as Instagram (58%), TikTok (51%), and YouTube (73%). The 35–54 age group moderately refer to YouTube (58%), Instagram (28%) and TikTok (26%). The 55+ age group has the lowest level of usage of online platforms (Khostaria et al., 2024).

Besides, researches show that Generation Z is more actively politically engaged and express more civic responsibility. Also, Generation Z's identity contains more blend of cultural inclusivity (Mataradze, 2023). So, the contrasts between those two generations causes scientific interest to explore their basic values deeper from the theoretical and practical perspectives.

Particularly, this study aims to examine the differences in value systems between millennials and Generation Z based on Schwartz's (1992) basic value theory in four high-order dimensions: self-transcendence, self-enhancement, conservation and openness to change. The study is particularly important because existing research mainly reflects the reality of Western cultures and the number of cross-generational studies in other cultures is scarce.

The study is based on a comparative analysis of the two generations along above-mentioned four high-level value dimensions. Each dimension reflects a different motivational orientation of values and allows for the analysis of value systems at both the individual and group levels. The study hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Generation Z will demonstrate statistically significant higher score in openness to change than Millennials;

H2: Generation Z will demonstrate statistically significant higher score in self-transcendence than Millennials.

H3: Millennials will demonstrate statistically significant higher score in self-enhancement than Generation Z;

H4: Generation Z will demonstrate statistically significant higher score in conservation than Millennials.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

**Swartz Theory of basic values:** Schwartz's theory of basic human values is one of the most influential and empirically supported theories in value research (Schwartz, 1992, 1994). According to the theory, values emerge from three universal needs necessary for human existence: biological needs, the need for coordinated social interaction and the need for group survival. These three needs are combined to form 10 universal values that guide human behavior, each of which is associated with a corresponding motivational goal: self-direction/autonomy, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, and universalism (Schwartz, 1992).

Schwartz places these values on a circular motivational continuum. Values that are adjacent to each other reflect similar motivations, while values that are opposite indicate motivational conflict. For example, self-direction and stimulation, which represent autonomy and novelty, conflict with conformity and tradition, which together represent obedience to social norms. This circular system has been replicated across cultures and social contexts, suggesting the universality of this theory (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Schwartz organizes these ten core values into four high-level dimensions. Self-transcendence encompasses benevolence and universalism and refers to a person's desire to care for others, uphold social order and justice, and care for nature. Self-enhancement encompasses power, achievement, and hedonism. It emphasizes

personal achievement, dominance, and the pursuit of pleasure. Openness to change includes self-direction, stimulation, and to some extent hedonism. It reflects independence, creativity, curiosity, and a willingness to try new things. Finally, conservation encompasses security, conformity, and tradition and is associated with stability, order, and resistance to change (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012).

These four high-ranking values are organized along two bipolar dimensions: openness to change versus conservation, and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement. This theoretical framework helps us analyze the prioritization of values within individuals, groups, and societies, as well as between them (Schwartz et al., 2012).

**Generation Cohorts and Value formation process:** The cohort concept suggests that people born during the same historical period share the similar process of forming values, attitudes, and worldviews (Mannheim, 1952). These shared experiences become particularly influential during adolescence and early adulthood, when values become more crystallized and internalized along with personal identity.

In modern research, generational cohorts are often characterized demographically. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are generally categorized as people born between approximately 1981 and 1996. Generation Z refers to people born between 1997 and 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Across the world, millennials have grown up in a time period characterized by globalization, rapidly evolving technology, and significant economic challenges, most notably the 2008 global financial crisis. These conditions have led to a delayed adoption of traditional adult roles, changing career expectations, and attitudes toward authority and institutions (Twenge et al., 2010). Generation Z, on the other hand, has grown up in an environment characterized by a strong digital presence, a strong emphasis on social media, and constant access to information. This cohort is also characterized by heightened awareness of global issues, such as climate change, political polarization, and health crises. Given such different sociohistorical contexts, it might be expected that millennials and Generation Z will have different intrinsic values.

However, studies of generations face a methodological challenge. Critics argue that apparent intergenerational differences reflect the effects of a particular developmental stage, rather than truly intergenerational differences (Costanza et al., 2012). For example, younger individuals may place greater value on openness to change because this value is more likely to emerge earlier in life. However, a combination of theories and research may reveal the effects that historical context has on the development of values.

Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have demonstrated age-dependent factors in the development of values. In particular, the values of openness to change and self-empowerment decline with age (Bardi et al., 2009; Vecchione et al., 2016). This phenomenon is mainly related to changes in social roles, responsibilities, and motivational factors.

However, age-related factors cannot fully explain the differences between cohorts. Cohort effects occur when people born in different periods exhibit value patterns that are resistant to age-related changes. Such effects are often associated with economic crises, political transitions, and rapid technological development.

Empirical studies based on Schwartz's (1992) theory examine value-related differences between cohorts. For example, a study conducted in Canada found that relatively young people place greater value on openness to change and self-empowerment than older people, who place greater value on conservation and self-transcendence (Lyons et al., 2007). Similar associations have been observed in

other countries, although the strength of the association and the direction of differences depend on cultural and historical context (Egri & Ralston, 2004).

Research on millennials often highlights that they place greater value on autonomy, self-actualization, and meaningful work, as well as social responsibility and work-life balance (Twenge et al., 2010; Ng et al., 2010). These characteristics are associated with the values of openness to change and self-transcendence. In addition, continued economic hardship and competition in the labor market are reinforcing the value of self-empowerment, which is related to achievement and personal success (Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2007, Kostis, 2021).

Generation Z is often characterized as socially conscious, pragmatic, and attentive to issues such as social diversity, inclusion, and environmental sustainability (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). These tendencies are strongly associated with the value of self-transcendence. In addition, growing up in a rapidly changing digital environment may provide a basis for openness to change, although the abundance of uncertain situations. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic and instability may increase the value of conservation, specifically security (personal and public) and conformity to rules (Sortheix et al., 2019; Value survey panel research, 2025).

Specifically, there is little research on millennials and Generation Z, especially in Eastern cultures. Some studies have suggested that Generation Z values security and stability more than millennials (Schroth, 2019), while others have also highlighted the connection between the younger cohort (Generation Z) and prosocial orientation, meaning that they score higher on values related to self-transcendence (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Such mixed results highlight the need for systematic, theoretically informed research.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is based on a quantitative, cross-sectional comparative design. The main goal of the study is to empirically examine the differences in value systems between Millennials and Generation Z, based on Schwartz's theoretical framework of basic human values (Schwartz, 1992). This approach allows for the assessment of the value priorities of the two generations at the specific point in time and the identification of similarities and differences between them.

**Research Participants:** The target population of this study was citizens living in Georgia who belong to two clearly differentiated intergenerational cohorts: Millennials and Generation Z. The classification of generations and the establishment of chronological boundaries of each group were based on internationally recognized theoretical frameworks, according to which the Millennial category included individuals born between 1981 and 1996, while respondents born since 1997 were defined as representatives of Generation Z. Strict control criteria were established for participation in the study, which included the respondent's age of majority (at least 18 years of age) and the ability to independently perceive and complete the research instrument (questionnaire). 161 participants participated in the study, 60.2% was Generation Z and 39.8% - Millennials.

The selection of participants was carried out on the basis of non-probability, namely, convenience sampling method which implies the inclusion of respondents based on their availability and voluntary willingness to participate in the study. The data collection process was carried out remotely, using digital and online platforms, which ensured a broad geographical and social representation of the respondents. To maintain a high standard of data quality control and validity, all questionnaires that were incompletely filled out were excluded at the final stage of the analysis in

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order to avoid statistical errors. The demographic profile of the participants is described in detail according to characteristics such as age, gender and generational affiliation. Generational categorization was the main independent variable of the study, on the basis of which further comparative analysis was carried out. Although the aforementioned sampling methodology imposes certain limitations regarding the generalization of the results to the entire population, it fully meets the research goals of the paper - to conduct an initial empirical identification and comparison of the value orientations of millennials and Generation Z in the modern Georgian sociocultural context.

161 respondents were participated in the study.

**Research Instruments and Procedure:** The questionnaire was created for survey study. Portrait Values Questionnaire-Revised (PVQ-RR) was used to measure the values<sup>1,2</sup>. Other variables was measured by stating the relevant questions in the questionnaire. The data was gathered by online survey method. Quantitative data processing program SPSS 26 was used to perform the relevant statistical procedures.

### Research Results

**Sample Description:** In terms of gender distribution, the absolute majority of the study participants are women (N = 138, which is 85.7% of the total sample), while the share of men is relatively small (N = 23, 14.3%). The age structure indicates that the younger cohorts were most actively involved in the study. In particular, the largest part of the respondents belongs to the 18-24 age category (N = 64, 39.8%), followed by the 25-29 age group (N = 42, 26.1%), which in total makes up more than half of the sample.

In terms of place of residence, the vast majority of the study participants are residents of the capital (N = 136, 84.5%), which indicates that the results obtained largely reflect value systems characteristic of the urban environment. In terms of educational level, the sample is highly qualified: the most widely represented are those with a bachelor's degree (N = 67, 41.6%) and master's degree (N = 44, 27.3%). It is also worth noting the employment status of the respondents - a significant part of the sample (68.3%) is employed, which indicates their economic and social activity.

**The reliability of the scale:** Internal consistency analysis showed that all four high-order dimensions are characterized by satisfactory and high reliability. The self-transcendence scale (15 items) showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .837$ ), and the self-empowerment scale (9 items) - high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .870$ ). The openness to change scale (12 items) showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .842$ ), and the conservation scale (15 items) also confirmed good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .829$ ).

In addition, in the case of the universalism-tolerance subscale (3 items),  $\alpha = .694$  was obtained, which is considered a satisfactory indicator for short scales and indicates sufficient homogeneity of the relevant items.

Overall, the results of the reliability analysis indicate that the instrument used in the study has sufficient psychometric reliability and provides reliable

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<sup>1</sup> Javakhishvili, N., Skhirtladze, N., Butsashvili, N., Lortkipanidze, M., Makashvili, A., Vardanashvili, I., & Shekriladze, I. (2016). Validation of research instruments. Proceedings of the conference dedicated to the 130th anniversary of the birth of Dimitri Uznadze. Tbilisi: Ilia State University.

<sup>2</sup> Schwartz, S.H., Cieciuch, J., Vecchione, M., Davidov, E., Fischer, R., Beierlein, C., Ramos, A., Verkasalo,

M., Lönnqvist, J.-E., Demirutku, K., Dirilen-Gumus, O., & Konty, M. (2012). Refining the theory of basic individual values. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103, 663-688.

measurement of value dimensions, which creates a basis for conducting further statistical analyses.

**Testing Hypothesis:** The main objective of the study was to conduct a comparative analysis of value orientations between the Millennial (born in 1981-1996) and Generation Z (born in 1997-2014) cohorts. To test the hypotheses and determine the statistical significance of the differences between the groups, the Independent Samples t-test was used.

**Hypothesis 1: Openness to change:** Using the Student's independent t-test, we examined the difference between the mean scores of openness to change by generation. The analysis revealed that the difference between the mean scores of Millennials ( $M = 56.67, SD = 6.09$ ) and Generation Z ( $M = 59.40, SD = 6.75; t(150) = -2.54, p = .012$ , two-tailed) was statistically significant. The magnitude of the difference between the means (mean difference =  $-2.74$ , 95% confidence interval:  $-4.87 - -0.61$ ) was estimated as a small effect (eta squared =  $.041$ ).

**Hypothesis 2: Self-transcendence:** Using an independent Student's t-test, we examined the difference between the mean scores of self-transcendence by generation. The analysis revealed that the difference between the mean scores of Millennials ( $M = 74.38, SD = 7.33$ ) and Generation Z ( $M = 76.21, SD = 7.96; t(157) = -1.46, p = .146$ , two-tailed) was not statistically significant. The magnitude of the difference between the means (mean difference =  $-1.83$ , 95% confidence interval:  $-4.30 - 0.64$ ) was assessed as small (eta squared =  $.013$ ).

**Hypothesis 3: Self-Empowerment:** Using an independent Student's t-test, we examined the difference between the mean scores of self-empowerment by generation. The analysis revealed that the difference between the mean scores of Millennials ( $M = 30.30, SD = 8.76$ ) and Generation Z ( $M = 31.34, SD = 8.39; t(159) = -0.76, p = .449$ , two-tailed) was not statistically significant. The magnitude of the difference between the means (mean difference =  $-1.04$ , 95% confidence interval:  $-3.76 - 1.67$ ) was assessed as very small (eta squared =  $.004$ ).

**Hypothesis 4: Conservation:** Using an independent Student's t-test, we examined the difference between the mean scores of conservation by generation. The analysis revealed that the difference between the mean scores of Millennials ( $M = 66.81, SD = 8.02$ ) and Generation Z ( $M = 68.16, SD = 8.96; t(156) = -0.97, p = .335$ , two-tailed) was not statistically significant. The magnitude of the difference between the means (mean difference =  $-1.35$ , 95% confidence interval:  $-4.10 - 1.40$ ) was assessed as very small (eta squared =  $.006$ ).

The results of the hypothesis testing showed that a statistically significant difference between the generations was detected only in the dimension of openness to change, where Generation Z showed a higher mean score compared to Millennials. Differences between generations in the dimensions of self-transcendence, self-enhancement, and conservation were not found to be statistically significant, and the magnitude of the effects was very small in most cases.

## Discussion

Based on the statistical operations conducted, several conclusions can be drawn. The hypothesis that Generation Z is more open to change than Millennials has been confirmed. Millennials grew up in a time period characterized by globalization, rapidly developing technology, and significant economic problems, while Generation Z grew up in an environment characterized by highly developed digital technology and continuous access to information (Twenge et al., 2010). Therefore, these results well explain the fact that Generation Z attaches greater importance to individual choice and autonomy, which contributes to the acceptance

of new ideas and easy adaptation to social changes. It is often characterized as socially conscious, pragmatic, and attentive to issues such as social diversity, inclusion, and environmental sustainability (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Generation Z is characterized by a search for change and novelty, which also increases their positive attitude towards change.

Regarding self-transcendence, self-empowerment and conservation, no statistically significant differences were observed between them and the generations. This can be explained by the fact that representatives of both generations grew up in more or less the same socio-economic conditions, with the same traditions and values. The age difference between them is not so great, which is why their parents are likely to have the same values and, accordingly, used a similar upbringing style, since individuals born in the same historical period share similar values and attitudes (Mannheim, 1952). In addition, both generations grew up in the era of digital media and globalization, therefore, specific legal or tolerance issues are of similar importance to both generations. Self-transcendence encompasses benevolence and universalism and refers to the human desire to care for others, uphold social order and justice, and care for nature (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012). It is strengthened when specific social problems become part of public discussion, and it is in such situations that existing intergenerational differences are expected to break down, so this may be the reason for the lack of differences between generations and the above-mentioned values, since intergenerational differences reflect the effects of a specific developmental stage and not truly differences between generations (Costanza et al., 2012). Values change more as a result of social context and individual experiences, and cross-cultural comparisons are relatively stable (Schwartz, 2005), so this could be the reason for the lack of differences in cross-generational comparisons. One reason may also be that the majority of the participants in the study were Georgian, and in Georgia, traditions, family, and values may act equally on both generations - due to Georgian culture.

It is important to study this issue in depth to better explain the differences between generations, so that the accumulated information can be used to plan and implement interventions.

It would be interesting to study values together with other variables and to raise awareness in society about this issue. It is likely that it would be beneficial to study this issue with a larger sample of millennials, both quantitatively and with different age groups and genders.

Ideas for future research on this issue also emerge. One of them is to study values in other age groups or even representatives of other generations.

### **Limitations**

The study has certain limitations. During the research process, we encountered problems such as participant selection. Given that we were studying two specific generations, it was more difficult to attract study participants. It should be noted that the uneven distribution of the number between generations may have affected the results obtained. It was also difficult to maintain a gender balance, as female participants predominated over male participants, which may also have affected the results obtained. Another problem could be the length of the research questionnaire, consisting of a total of 71 questions (including demographic questions). We used the questionnaire, but due to its length, many participants refused to continue filling out the questionnaire. Another problem is that since the questionnaire was sent to the participants in an online format, the environment in which they filled it out

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could not be controlled, so the presence of various distractors in this regard cannot be ruled out.

### Conclusions

The main findings of the study show that Generation Z is more open to new experiences than Millennials which is logical result of the contrast social-economic and political influences there were affected during the socialization. The restrict amount of studies conducted on the relevant research subjects also show that they prefer to refer even different information sources. Younger Generation try to search diverse information via online platforms. However, older people are more TV-oriented (Khostaria et, al., 2024).

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