How Do Social Media Influencers Play a Role in Indonesian Student Career Planning?

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Abstract. The objective of this paper is to investigate the opinions of Generation Z students in Indonesia regarding the role of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in their career planning process. This qualitative research used data collection through in-depth interviews with ten students from various universities in Indonesia. The selection of informants in this study used non-random sampling with a purposive sampling technique. The qualifications for selecting informants in this research are Generation Z students in Indonesia who follow at least one SMI who shares content about careers on social media. The finding for this research is that Generation Z students in Indonesia use social media to follow SMIs who share about careers to start planning their careers before graduating. The informants generally expressed that the three stages in career planning (self-assessment, career exploration, and job search) can be supported by information provided by SMIs who share content about careers on social media.

Keywords: Career Planning, Social Media Influencer (SMI), Generation Z, Social Media.

1 Introduction

Generation Z, as people born between 1997 and 2012 or currently aged between 11 and 24 years, dominates the population in Indonesia, with 74.93 million or 27.94% of the total population of Indonesia [1]. Most of Generation Z are currently undergoing activities as students in universities. Generation Z is very close to social media: 60% of respondents said that they started their social life online [2]. Generation Z has the tendency to use social media to obtain information that is sourced from content shared by Social Media Influencers (SMIs). A Social Media Influencer is someone who has a wide network of social media followers because of their digital content, and thus has the power to influence followers [3]. SMIs present themselves through ideas and expertise, and they often sponsor products in the form of goods or services by creating content to distribute to their followers [4]. Statistics show that 70% of teenagers trust SMIs more than traditional celebrities [5].

SMIs usually have focus areas to show that they are specialists of those certain areas. Vina Muliana, for example, stated that she is a content creator in the field of education, specifically for career guidance. Vina Muliana started actively creating content since 2021, increasing her

followers to four million on TikTok and 300 thousand on Instagram. She received the Best Learning & Education award at the 2021 Indonesia TikTok Awards. Additionally, she was listed as a recipient of the Forbes 30 Under 30 2022 and Digital Stars 2022 awards by Forbes Indonesia. The content shared by Vina on social media generates great responses from her followers, especially those of the younger generation who are in the process of preparing for their careers. Another example is Julio Ekspor, who is a social media influencer with 448 thousand followers and a young exporter who founded the "Komunitas Bisa Ekspor" with 392 thousand followers on Instagram. Julio is an entrepreneur who has made billions of rupiahs while still a teenager and has the mission of creating one million new Indonesian exporters through his community. Through his large number of followers, he regularly shares content related to the export of various commodities from Indonesia. These two example SMIs are only a small part of the many SMIs in Indonesia. The younger generation who follow and interact with them on social media certainly has their reasons and their needs.

Social Media Influencers have been found to impact their followers significantly, according to various academic studies [3,6,7]. These studies show that SMIs can influence their followers in many ways, as motivating them to pursue certain careers or even just providing entertainment [8]. The success of SMIs in influencing their followers depends on several characteristics, including ambition, intelligence, productivity, attractiveness, uniqueness, usefulness, entertainment, and fun [9,10]. Additionally, trustworthiness, honesty, and similarity are also important factors in creating a strong bond between SMIs and their followers [11–14]. Some SMIs focus on specific areas, such as career planning, as seen with Vina Muliana and Julio Ekspor. SMIs can profoundly impact their followers, and influencers and followers need to be aware of this effect.

As those of the younger generation (including Generation Z) continue to explore their career aspirations, social media has become an integral part of their daily lives. With the massive amount of content provided by Social Media Influencers (SMIs), it is not surprising that many studies have found that SMIs can influence their followers to make purchases [15–17]. However, social media is not just about marketing. It also offers platforms for planning and developing careers, connecting professionals with new contacts, recruiting employees, and staying in touch with the business world. This becomes the reason why this research focuses on the opinions of Generation Z university students regarding the role of Social Media Influencers in their career planning. Through in-depth interviews, insights are expected to be gained regarding how Social Media Influencers can help Generation Z achieve their career goals. This research has the objective to provide an overview of the types of social media content that can positively influence Generation Z in preparing for their future careers. The findings can inspire SMIs to create and share more useful content for Generation Z to encourage them to pursue their goals.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Generation Z and Social Media

According to a McKinsey survey of 41,960 individuals in 26 countries, including Indonesia, Generation Z spends more time accessing social media than any other age group worldwide. By the survey, it was discovered that 58% of Generation Z respondents spend over an hour on

social media. Specifically, 35% of them spend over two hours, while 23% spend one to two hours on social media each day [18]. According to Black & Perold [19], teenagers initially viewed social media as a way to stay connected with their peers. However, they later realized that social media has a significant impact on their careers and studies, whether consciously or unconsciously. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook are now important sources of career-related information, including job searches, selection and recruitment practices, and career decisions [20]. Additionally, social media is a useful tool for career advancement and job searches [21]. It can also provide valuable information for planning successful careers [20].

2.2 Career Planning

When it comes to achieving professional goals and personal satisfaction, timely career planning is essential. According to most contemporary literature, career planning is seen as a means by which graduates can proactively attain early career outcomes [22]. The process of career planning involves identifying oneself and implementing the necessary steps and activities to reach professional goals. There are three primary stages of career planning: self-assessment, career exploration, and job search [23]. Additionally, career planning has numerous benefits for employees and employers, such as reducing mistakes, aligning employees with company objectives, and strengthening the development potential of both employees and the organization as a whole [24].

Career planning has specific links to the millennial generation, which is composed of optimistic young people who have high expectations and want to achieve success as professionals [25]. Growing up in a digitally connected world, this generation uses the Internet as a tool for learning, building relationships, socializing, and working [24]. Career planning at the beginning of the 21st century is unpredictable due to the consequences of the economic crisis over the last ten years, which has resulted in pessimism and hopelessness among young people [26].

2.3 Social Media Influencer (SMI)

The rise of social media has brought about a new type of influencer known as Social Media Influencers (SMIs). These individuals have built up a large following on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter through their digital content and can use their influence to sway their followers' decisions [3]. SMIs often promote products or services by creating content that showcases their ideas and expertise [4]. Surprisingly, statistics have shown that many people trust SMIs more than traditional celebrities, including 70% of teenagers [5]. Additionally, 53% of women make purchases based on recommendations by SMIs [27].

Several leading brands have started promoting themselves through SMIs to increase awareness of their products and boost sales [14,28,29]. According to industry experts, the social media influencer industry is expected to grow to approximately $15 billion by 2022, up from $8 billion in 2019 [30,31]. This significant growth is mainly due to the strong influence that SMIs have on their followers, who find them relatable and easily accessible [32].

3 Method

This qualitative research used the data collection technique of in-depth interviews, involving ten students from various universities in Indonesia. The selection of informants in this study was carried out by non-random sampling with a purposive sampling technique. The qualifications for selecting informants in this research are Generation Z students in Indonesia with a maximum age of 24 years and who follow at least one SMI who shares content about careers on social media. During the in-depth interviews, time limitations may have required limiting the number of informants. This strategy facilitated a more thorough examination of each informant's viewpoint and emotional reactions within their societal framework. It is important to remember that the purpose of these interviews is not to establish facts impartially, but to obtain a more profound comprehension of the informants' encounters [33]. During the interviews, the probing technique was utilized to encourage the informants to share their experiences in detail. To protect the data, the informants were referred to by code names (S1 to S10) instead of their real names. The research employed narrative analysis and had the objective of measuring the complex reactions and feelings of the informants in their social context. By acting as social actors and sharing their stories, the informants were involved in forming certain meanings [34,35].

4 Results and Discussion

In this research, ten Generation Z students aged between 18-21 years from various universities in Indonesia, different study programs, and various regions throughout Indonesia shared their experiences with SMIs. They all agreed that the content by SMIs about careers was extremely helpful in planning their career paths. The informants received information about different careers, education requirements, qualifications, work environments, job hunting tips, and many other valuable insights. This information helped them to create a roadmap for their career planning. The informant's opinions corroborate Ki & Kim's statement [3] that SMIs have the power to influence their followers. The most frequently used social media platforms by the informants were Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube. They viewed one to three SMIs who shared career content on their social media. The content about careers shared by the SMIs is highly relevant and useful for the informants in planning their careers.

Career planning consists of three primary stages: self-assessment, career exploration, and job search [32]. For the self-assessment phase, all the informants acknowledged that the career content by the SMIs was beneficial in mapping out their career paths. Informant S2 had the opinion that the shared career content increased their awareness of the significance of career planning and helped them evaluate their interests. Informants S4-S10 further added that the career content by the SMIs was a point of reference in assessing their skills and enhancing them according to the demands of their desired profession. Finally, informants S1, S3, and S10 remarked that accessing the career content by the SMIs provided them with valuable insights into the preparations needed when planning their careers.

The ten informants were then interviewed to gather insights on their career exploration as the second stage of career planning. One of them, S8, expressed that the career content shared by the SMI they viewed did not cater to their interest in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS).

However, the remaining nine informants found the career content shared by SMIs on social media to be very helpful. For instance, S1 mentioned that the SMI they viewed had guided them in exploring various professions related to their university studies. Furthermore, S2, S4, S5, S6, S7, and S10 disclosed that the career content shared by SMIs enabled them to explore careers that aligned with their interests and helped them develop essential skills. S3 advised that while SMIs are a valuable resource, seeking career assessment from human resource professionals in relevant companies is equally important. Lastly, S9 recommended that individuals utilize the different career content shared by multiple SMIs to determine the type of profession that suits their qualifications and abilities.

The final step in career planning involves finding a job that aligns with student interests. According to the interview, eight out of the ten informants reported that Social Media Influencers (SMIs) who shared career-related content can assist them in this process. However, one informant (S5) expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of specificity in the content by the SMIs they follow and the informant is searching for an influencer who shares tailored content. Another informant (S7) felt that as an entry-level student, the content by SMIs was not particularly helpful in finding a job that suited their interests, as they were primarily focused on gaining experience through lecture organizations and volunteer activities. However, the majority of informants (S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, S8, S9, and S10) believed that SMIs can help them find their dream job after graduation. Some informants (S6, S8, and S10) added that the content by SMIs also provided information about job vacancies, internships, and daily life at specific companies, as well as various opportunities related to their interests, which helped them solidify their aspirations to work for a particular company.

Based on the opinions expressed by the informants, it can be inferred that SMIs who share career-related content on social media play a crucial role in the career planning process. Although not much literature is available on the usage of social media and the impact on career choices or self-confidence among higher education students, previous research has shown that career choices by those of the younger generation are not influenced by digital media [36]. Additionally, another research had shown that social media does not impact career confidence [37]. However, the results of this research indicate a positive relationship between the use of social media and career planning by following SMIs who share career-related content. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown a link between career self-confidence and social media usage [38]. Furthermore, this is supported by another research, which has the finding that 61% of students use social media to search for information when considering their next career choice [39].

5 Conclusion

Indonesian Generation Z students are utilizing social media to prepare for their careers before graduating by following SMIs that provide career-related content. They argue that such content can offer diverse information about career paths, education requirements, necessary qualifications for certain professions, work environments in various companies, job-seeking tips, and other career-related details. These students believe that the information can help them create a career planning roadmap and serve as valuable references. Social media is not just an entertainment platform for Generation Z, but also a source of career planning information.

According to the research informants, the career-related content by SMIs on social media can assist with the three stages of career planning, as self-assessment, career exploration, and job search. The informative content helps individuals assess their abilities and identify areas for improvement, thus aiding in the self-assessment stage. In the career exploration phase, SMIs provide guidance based on the informants' interests and degree program. Additionally, the informants found the social media content by SMIs useful for the job search process, as it provided them with relevant information about job qualifications and requirements. As a result, the informants began to collect information and develop skills to qualify for their desired future positions.

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