

Characteristics of Gen-Z YouTube Viewers as Potential Consumers for Influencer Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z are generation who are technology dependence and always look for enjoyment and connectivity. One way to achieve both is by watching videos on YouTube. This habit can be utilized by brands to advertise their products through YouTube marketing, particularly Influencer marketing, in which brands use social media Influencers to convey their marketing messages. This research aims to examine the characteristics of generation Z YouTube viewers and to find out whether these characteristics are beneficial for YouTube influencer marketing. To gather data, we carried out an online survey to 178 participants who were chosen because they were representing the cohort of Generation Z (from 18-to 34 years old). The results showed that the participants were active users of YouTube platform, known from the usage, number of subscribed channels, type of content preferred and sharing and commenting behaviour. The results of the study suggest that using Influencer marketing especially through YouTube, might be beneficial for companies to attract young consumers and make them into potential target market.

Keywords: Characteristics, Generation Z, Influencer Marketing, YouTube.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, there is a massive shift in business patterns as a result of the presence of internet technology, which makes it easier for people to buy household or office necessities that are available in the market without hassle. Internet-based digital devices have become an integral part of business processes.

LaQuey (as cited in Ardianto, 2007) explains that what distinguishes the internet and other global networks from traditional communication technologies is the level of interaction and speed that users can enjoy broadcasting their messages. Therefore, internet can also support business interaction.

The occurrence of the Covid 19 virus pandemic at the end of 2019 made the internet the only safe option for social interaction. The internet has become a mainstay for the activities of the world community, both in terms of teaching and learning, transactions of goods and services, health consultations, legal activities, and so on. Even among MSME players who previously only promoted their products conventionally, suddenly they should change into internet-based applications.

Internet-based businesses are made easier by the presence of various platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and others.

With these diverse platforms, it is possible to have more massive social interactions for personal and professional purposes. A survey conducted by Business Insider found that Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube are the three most popular social media platforms, especially for Generation Z.

Generation Z, who are now in the range of 18-34 years old, is very active on social media platforms, have a good socioeconomic background and are easy to get information in a fully urbanized and developing economy (Yadav & Rai, 2017). Generation Z can also be potential customers for products targeted to them, especially if the products were advertised through YouTube platform. However, to be able to grab this opportunity, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of Generation Z, specifically by knowing their YouTube viewing behavior.

Therefore, in the present study, we conducted a survey involving Generation Z participants to find out their characteristics and relate the findings with their potentials as young consumers for influencer marketing through YouTube. There are two research questions that are going to be addressed in this study.

1. What are the characteristics of Gen Z YouTube viewers?
2. How are these characteristics benefit for YouTube influencer marketing?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Characteristics of Gen-Z as Young Consumers

Generation Z are those who were born a couple of years before the turn of the century, so they can be considered the first real 21st century generation. This generation was born amidst technology, so they always carry technology and do several activities simultaneously using technology. This generation wants to be connected all the time and Internet access is considered as their basic necessity.

Being technology-dependent, Generation Z can become a promising captive market for companies who promote their products through internet-based marketing, for example via YouTube channels. Businesses can upload their commercials via brand channels. YouTube brand channels have become cost-effective canals since commercials can be uploaded freely, and they might be viewed by millions of young consumers, especially when the contents are sufficiently entertaining to go viral (Duffet, 2020).

YouTube video commercials can change the way young consumers view commercials because they can watch them in their leisure time. However, young viewers often found video commercials to be intrusive, so they will likely skip them. To deal with this issue, companies can also use product placements, influencers, celebrity endorsers, YouTubers, and testimonials to advertise their products.

Young consumers nowadays are increasingly relying on social media influencers, especially those who have YouTube channels. These influencers are individuals who were compensated for their perspectives, which gives brands some control over the content (Hughes *et al.*, 2019; Florenthal, 2019). Therefore, companies can place their advertising messages inside the influencers' contents. Young consumers will be likely to watch influencers' video content rather than watching promotional videos from brand channels directly.

The likelihood of video watching will be amplified if the videos contain entertainment elements. Shu and Chuang (2011) stated that many people use social media for enjoyment and relaxation purposes. Similarly, Rohm *et al.* (2013) found that consumers, especially young people, frequently engage online with brands as a source of entertainment by searching for videos and other entertaining brand content. This suggests that entertainment can be the key element to the most sought videos. Shao and Ross (2015) even claimed that entertainment is a key reason consumers stay engaged with a brand's Facebook page after they initially followed the page.

Delivering entertaining content that is easy to share, therefore, becomes a critical point to engage consumers to the brand (Azar, *et al.*, 2016). Besides giving entertaining content, consumer engagement can also be measured from their content consumption, such as following, learning, reading, and watching videos; or from their contribution such as reacting, commenting, and sharing the videos, as well as creating one (Vandershee, 2021). To facilitate continuous consumer engagement, brands need to develop entertaining content and experiences by themselves or sponsored the said content to certain influencers who are well-known for their entertaining content.

B. YouTube Influencer Marketing

Social media has rapidly modified the modern marketing because social media has become an essential aspect of consumers' everyday lives and therefore change the consumption habits of consumers (Acikgoz & Burnaz, 2021). On the other hand, social media also give birth to the influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is the term given to the mode of marketing by utilizing the influence of well-known figures in the community. These well-known figures are commonly known as influencers. These influencers can be celebrities, industry experts and thinkers, bloggers or content creators and micro-influencers. They are also called social media influencers as they are considered opinion leaders on various social media platforms of topics of particular interest such as beauty, food, lifestyle, fashion, and so on (Bruns, 2018).

Companies use social media influencers to showcase and market their products to their target interest groups and to communicate a brand through the social media channels of the influencers (Evans *et al.*, 2017). The existence of social media, thus, allows these figures to spread their influence on the target consumers for using certain products or services. They basically transmit psychological influence on the community of admirers so that they eventually desire to use the same product or service as the influencers.

Consumers personally identify more with social media influencers, and they see them as role models. Obviously, personal identification with the influencers will lead to a desire to buy or use the products or services being advertised. This purchase intention, which is defined by Khan *et al.* (2020) as a person's desire to buy something that has met the criteria and has value, is motivated by messages and information conveyed by social media influencers, especially if the product is tangible (Babić Rosario *et al.*, 2016). Influencers, therefore, have the power to influence the purchasing decision of the public because of their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their followers (Ateke, 2013). In their study, Terrasista and Sidharta (2021) found a positive influence between social media or influencer marketing and consumer purchase intention.

Influencer marketing help brands convey advertising, communication, or brand messages through opinion leaders (Scott, 2015). They do this with electronic word of mouth, brand pages, and using celebrities in ads and sponsored content (Evans *et al.*, 2017). To create effective advertising for consumers, influencer marketing mostly appeared at Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. Through these social media, the activities and information carried out by influencers are followed by the audience, especially their followers, which then shape the perception of the products promoted or described by the said influencers (Solomon, 2017). Influencers, in this digital era, are not simply marketing tools, but they are social relationship assets which can be collaborated to achieve marketing goals (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018).

One of the main platforms which is mainly used by influencers and influencer marketing is YouTube. This platform enables people to watch other videos or upload self-made content. YouTube does not only function as video showing platform, but it also serves as a communication channel between the creators and the users.

Viewers can interact with the content creators by giving likes and emoticons, or by commenting on the videos. Influencers' contents usually draw more attention from their viewers, thus increasing viewers' engagement with their videos. In turn, viewers' engagement will likely increase brand awareness and possibly their purchasing intention of the brands being advertised by the influencers.

Realizing the power of influencer influence is so great, now companies are more intensively using them for influencer marketing activities. Many companies are motivated to spend more of their marketing budget online because consumers are increasingly using online media to search for information (Kireyev *et al.*, 2016). As a result of the positive impact on the company economically, of course, an influencer deserves to be rewarded. A celebrity influencer describes someone who has gained influence because of his fame. Due to its popularity, this type of influencer usually has a high price range to use its influence on others (Senft, 2008).

III. METHODS

To carry out this research, we conduct a survey of 178 participants who were randomly selected for this study. The participants consist of 134 university students and 44 employees in Jakarta, Indonesia. They were chosen because they can be categorized as Generation Z which ranges from 18 to 34 years old. The participants comprised 35% male and 65% female. All of them admitted they were active users of YouTube and followed some social media influencers' channels.

The instrument for this study is a questionnaire consisting of 7 questions besides the preliminary demographic questions. The questionnaire was self-administered and distributed via Google Forms. All the questions were close-ended, and no detailed written questions were required. The questionnaire includes questions about YouTube viewing behaviour, the type of content, subscribed channels, and sharing behaviour. The data from the questionnaires were then tallied and calculated using simple descriptive calculations and presented in charts and tables.

IV. RESULTS

The results for the seven questions are presented one by one in table and charts below.

The first question is: *How long have you used YouTube?* The answers can be seen in Fig. 1.

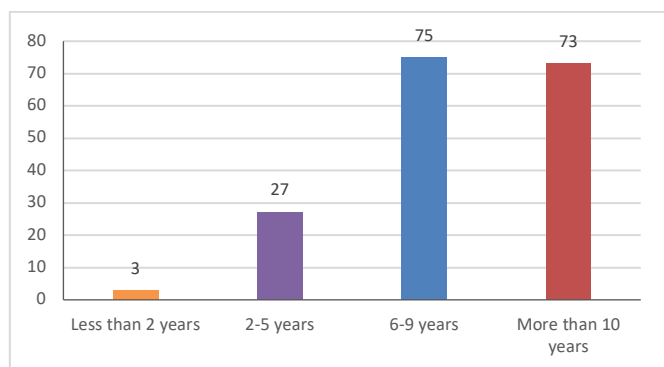


Fig. 1. YouTube length of use.

The participants in this study are Gen-Z who have high interest in technology. In figure 1, it can be seen that 42.13% of the participants have used YouTube for 6 to 9 years. It is a little higher than those who use it for 10 years or more.

The second question is: *What type of content do you like?* The answers can be seen in Fig. 2.

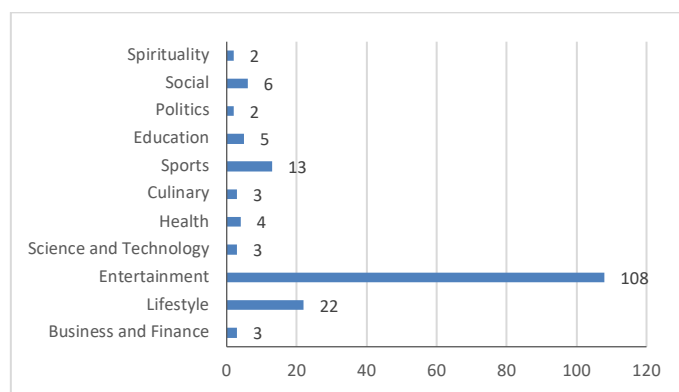


Fig. 2. Preferred Video Contents.

YouTube is an open public application that allows the public to share, receive, and forward any content. The finding of this study shows, as shown in Fig. 2 above, that respondents prefer entertainment content over other content, such as business, health, sports, education, lifestyle. This can be due to Generation Z having a busy life in college or work so in between their time they look for entertaining content, such as celebrity news, funny videos, or places to visit.

The third question is: *How many channels do you subscribe?* The answer to that question is shown in Fig. 3.

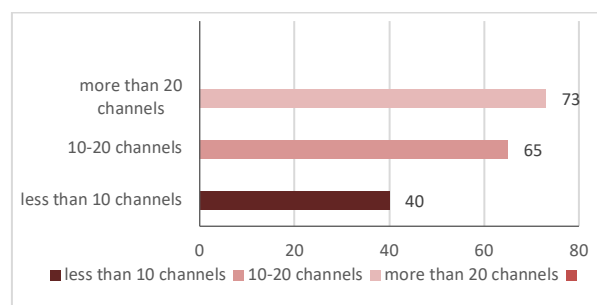


Fig. 3. Number of Subscribed Channels.

Fig. 3 shows that the participants of this study are active users of YouTube. 41% of them subscribed to more than 20 channels, 36.52% follow around 10 to 20 channels, and the rest follow less than 10 channels. Subscribing to certain channels allow them to keep updated and informed of the contents.

Question 4 asks *How often do you share interesting videos?* The answer can be seen in Fig. 4 below.

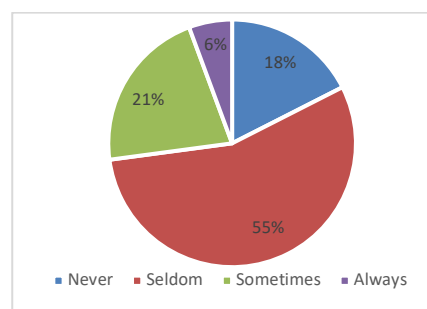


Fig. 4. Video sharing frequency.

Regarding the frequency of video sharing, 55% of participants stated that they rarely share the YouTube videos they watch. This shows that participants enjoy watching the videos by themselves. 21% said that they sometimes share some interesting videos or if they think that the videos also attract other people’s attentions. Only 6% always share interesting content with others. The rest 18% never share videos with others.

Question 5 asks: *How often do you give comment for the video?* Here is the answer.

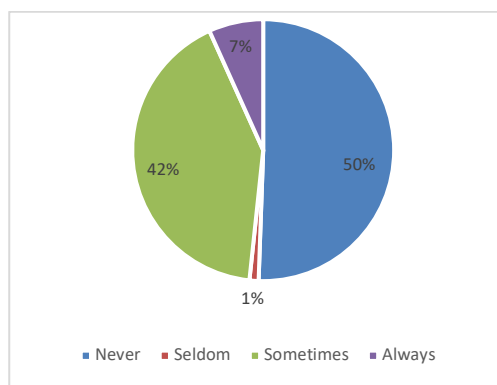


Fig. 5. Commenting frequency.

The YouTube videos watched by the participants were mostly for entertainment purposes which they occasionally enjoyed at their spare times. Thus, it is not deemed necessary for them to give comment, as half of the participants (50%) stated they never commented on the videos they watched. However, quite a lot (42%) of respondents stated that they sometimes make comments. Only 7% who make comments on the videos they watched.

The sixth question is: *Do you have your own channel?* To this question, 85% of the participants said they do not have private channel, while the rest 15% admitted they have YouTube channel. Presumably, YouTube is only an application that they use for entertainment, so they don't feel the need to create a channel that might take time to create, in addition to being consistent in filling out the channel and choosing content that can attract viewers.

Question 7: *If you have your own channel, what kind of content will you make?* The answers can be seen in Fig. 6 below.

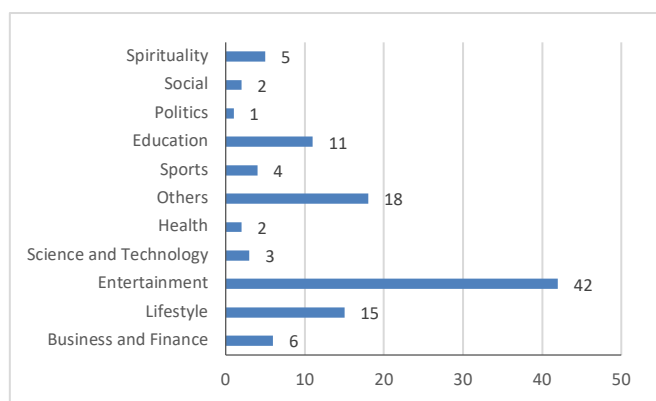


Fig. 6. Type of Contents.

This is a hypothetical question since 85 % of the participants did not have their own channel, thus if they created a channel, they would be more interested in creating entertainment contents. This is consistent with the kind of channel they like, which is also entertainment. The second most preferred is lifestyle channels.

V. DISCUSSION

Generation Z was born a few years before the turn of the century (year 2000) and onwards. We can call this generation the first true 21st century generation. Generation Z is technology dependent, always connected, and carries their electronic devices with them. (Duffet, 2020) They also regularly engage in multiple activities at once and have an unquenchable desire for rapid satisfaction (de Coninck, 2018). Generation Z wants the content to be instantaneously accessible in audio (e.g. podcasts) and video, as well as segmented text to facilitate skimming for online site reading.

Generation Z, who are aged between 18 and 34, formed a huge part of YouTube users and they are following, subscribing, and watching their YouTube channel (Perrin, 2005). As the findings of this study show, most participants (60.67%) preferred to watch entertainment contents on YouTube. Consistently, they also said that if they build their own channel, they will fill it with entertainment content.

As potential customers, Generation Z was more likely to be interested in advertisements that contain entertainment. Entertainment is considered as an essential purpose of advertising (Yang & Smith, 2009). Lee and Choi (2005) stated that entertainment in advertisement represents satisfied customers, enjoyment, and pleasure. Thus, it is essential to put entertainment factor in every content to convey the message to the consumers. Advertising by displaying pleasant entertainment will likely be able to satisfy consumers’ needs (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). Moreover, entertainment content can also shape a positive attitude towards advertisement (Okazaki, 2007).

Besides the content, the findings also show the number of channels subscribed by the participants. All the participants admitted subscribing to YouTube channels, with 79.77 % subscribes to more than 10 channels. Again, most of the channels they subscribed are entertainment channels. Channel subscribers can be used by marketers to promote their products. It seems unlikely that young generation consumers subscribe to the official brand producers’ channel directly, since they do not want to be watching advertisement all the time. One way to deal with this issue is by employing influencer marketing. Influencer marketing involves partnering with and utilizing the key figures who have the greatest influence over potential customers regarding any given brand and product (Brown & Hayes, 2008). The key figures used in influencer marketing are usually artists, singers, football players, or any other celebrities. Among the channels they subscribed, the participants admitted following these celebrities’ channels.

An influencer has the capability to affect the attitude and/or the ideas of others (Combley, 2011). Imagine then, when an influencer who has more than 2 million subscribers insert a sponsored message in his content, he will be able to attract

the attention of all his subscribers to the said product. Influencer marketing then can be used by advertisers or product brands to communicate and approach with the consumers, especially young consumers.

Nowadays, YouTube has been one of the most attractive social media platforms, especially when dealing with influencer marketing. YouTube creates a significant global platform for communicating, advertising, and marketing strategies (Chiang & Hsia, 2015). YouTube can also bridge the needs of the consumers for information and entertainment with those of the advertisers to convey the message of their products. However, this connection can be done more smoothly by involving influencers in marketing their products, as influencer marketing is able to create effective advertising for consumers.

Nevertheless, influencers should also consider adding entertainment in their contents to improve the advertising value. Adding entertainment feature can draw young consumers' attention and maintain their relationship with the products being advertised (Chowdhury *et al.* 2006).

One way to see how the consumers engage with the products being advertised is by looking at their willingness to comment or share the contents they were watching. The findings of this study showed that in total only 53.75% were willing to share videos and 50% wanted to make comments of the videos. These findings indicate that in this stage young customers did not really care about sharing and commenting on the videos, yet they only wanted to treat the content for entertainment purposes only. In fact, consumers who make posts about their perception or experience of certain products or services (through sharing or commenting) can increase engagement with certain brands (Vander Schee, 2020). Brand engagement will be enhanced when companies and consumers are aligned on the nature and scope of the messages they create and share (Hinson *et al.*, 2019).

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings in this study show that most Generation Z has used YouTube for more than 5 years, so they were already familiar with YouTube and supposedly with other kinds of social media. Next, they prefer watching and creating entertainment contents on YouTube. Moreover, this generation is also active media users, as seen by the number of their subscribed channels and their sharing and commenting preference.

Our findings suggest that Generation Z, based on their YouTube viewing characteristics can become a potential market for marketing or advertising via YouTube, especially through influencer marketing, as young viewers were likely to be easily influenced by the influencers whom they were following. Therefore, brands may be well advised to take advantage of the opportunities presented by YouTube influencers for fostering and empowering stronger brand relationships with these young consumers.

However, in this study we have not asked the participants about the specific influencers that they are following. Nor did we ask the level of purchase intention of the participants after watching the influencers' contents. Therefore, we cannot validate the effectiveness of influencer marketing in this stage

of our study. For future research, we hope to continue our study with those issues. Moreover, we would also like to see the effect of influencer marketing on the brand sales.

The contents of the journal are peer-reviewed and archival. The journal publishes scholarly articles of archival value as well as tutorial expositions and critical reviews of classical subjects and topics of current interest.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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