



The Influence of Personal Branding on Job Opportunities for Gen Z

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ABSTRACT

News about 9.9 million Gen Z individuals struggling to find jobs or facing unemployment has caught the public's attention. Media often discuss external factors, such as intense competition, unstable economic conditions, low education levels, and limited job opportunities as primary causes of this issue. According to data from Sakernas in February 2024, there are 4,905,012 unemployed Gen Z individuals, with most being between 20-24 years old. Additionally, the stigma labeling Gen Z as the "strawberry generation" is increasingly prevalent. They are perceived as lacking clear career goals and often applying for jobs that don't match their qualifications or experience. This highlights a lack of awareness about the importance of personal branding. Personal branding could be a crucial key for Gen Z to better understand and navigate their careers. Through personal branding, individuals can recognize their potential, uniqueness, and values, and then present them in ways relevant to the job market. Thus, Gen Z could stand out more easily amid fierce competition and open up more career opportunities. The purpose of this objective is to make Gen Z aware of the importance of personal branding and self-development. Additionally, it aims to counter the negative stigma associated with their generation.

Keywords: personal branding; gen z; career

1. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment among developing countries, including Indonesia, is an issue that continues to be of concern. Unemployment occurs when a person is of working age but does not have a job despite actively seeking work. At the end of 2023, the media widely discussed that around 9.9 million Gen Z in Indonesia were still unemployed. In addition, there is also a negative stigma from society towards Gen Z, where they are often considered weak, unable to withstand pressure, and overly sensitive.

According to data from the Pekerjaan Layak di Indonesia Vol.7 2024, there are many young people who fall into the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) category, or open unemployment. Based on Sakernas data from February 2024, there are 4.9 million Gen Zs who are unemployed, with the majority aged 20-24 (Nurbaiti, 2024)^[15]. This phenomenon is not only happening in Indonesia, but also in other countries such as China with an unemployment rate of 21.3% in 2023 and the United States, where only 45% of young people aged 18-24 are financially independent (Wijaya, 2024)^[17].

Gen Z in Indonesia actually has higher skills, knowledge and courage than the previous generation. However, they often overestimate the work they get. This overestimation arises because they have a lot of knowledge about the outside world, but lack hands-on experience. When they finally enter the workforce, their mental state often fluctuates. Gen Z tends to prefer workplaces that offer freedom to grow, flexible work schedules, and high overtime or paid time off pay. This is because

they are more aware of the realities of life today, where the cost of daily necessities is much more expensive compared to the era of previous generations. (Nurqamar et al., 2022)^[3].

According to the book *Strawberry Generation* by Rhenald Khasali (2017)^[14], the strawberry generation is creative and full of ideas, as well as critical. But there is also a negative side, which is easily fragile, hurt, and disappointed.

The thing that makes Gen Z different from Gen Y or millennials is that Gen Z does not understand the concept of struggle, preferring to find solutions smartly rather than deciding wisely. This is one of the characteristics of Gen Z who likes instant things, in contrast to Gen Y who enjoys all the processes of his life and is easier to accept changes in circumstances. (Bencsik & Horváth-Csikós, 2016)^[5].

In addition, the main factors that make it difficult for Indonesians to find jobs include a lack of skilled labor, inadequate infrastructure, and a complicated policy framework, as well as low employment due to a mismatch between colleges and working field, among other problems (Suhandi et al. 2021)^[11].

Then the other factor based on interview data is from within gen Z itself, namely that many still do not know the goals they want to be interested in. They have not found their image and uniqueness or what is called personal branding. In fact, people who have talent and can do a good job will lose to people who have a 'brand' image or *personal-branding* (Joseph, 2013)^[13].

Personal branding is the process of shaping people's perceptions of one's personality, abilities and values, thereby creating a positive view of a physically and mentally healthy society. Personal branding can also be interpreted as a person's identity that is able to elicit an emotional response, based on the qualities and values they have (Zahra, 2022)^[3].

The purpose of this study is to help Gen Z understand why there is a link between personal branding that can make it easier for them to get a job, as well as break the negative stigma that is often pinned on them by previous generations.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The data collection method used qualitative methods, namely by conducting *Focus Discussion Groups (FDG)*, interviews, literature studies, and field observations.

a. Interview

Interviews were conducted with Ms. Bernadeta Dwi Hapsari (HR PT. Gramedia Asri Media) and Mr. Gomulia Oscar (Founder of Gen Ztrive Community), who provided insights on Gen Z's behavior and needs. Both were conducted on July 12, 2024.

b. Focus Discussion Group (FDG)

Interviews with 7 Gen Z who are currently interning and studying, discussing their career plans were conducted on June 19, 2024.

c. Literature Study

Collecting data from journals, articles, books, podcasts, and videos related to Gen Z.

d. Observation

Attending Gen Ztrive seminars, a community that focuses on self-development and soft skills

whose members are Gen Z members. This method is done by exchanging ideas with members, as well as participating in seminars held every Friday at 18.00-20.00 at APL Tower, Central Park.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Literature

According to Sadono Sukirno (1994), unemployment is a condition in which a person who is included in the labor force wants to get a job but has not managed to get it. Unemployment occurs when someone wants to work but cannot find a job (Franita et. al., 2019)^[1]. Open unemployment is those who are looking for work, preparing a business, or those who have a job but have not or choose not to work (Ardian, et al., 2022)^[4]. According to the Deloitte 2023 survey, the cost of living is the main concern of Gen Z in the world as much as 53%, followed by 22% of Gen Z worried about not getting a job or unemployment (Zaman, 2024)^[12].

Types of Unemployment

Unemployment can be divided into three types:

- **Disguised Unemployment**
Labor that does not work optimally for certain reasons.
- **Underemployed**
Workers who work less than 35 hours per week.
- **Open Unemployment**
Workers who really do not have a job.

There are several factors that are the reason why Gen Z finds it difficult to find a job, which are as follows:

a. Manufacturing competitiveness of the country

Indonesia itself is experiencing Premature Deindustrialization (Theodora, 2023)^[16], which means the decline of the manufacturing sector in the industry. This problem has occurred since the rapid decline in 2009 and will continue until 2023. The percentage of National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) according to BPS, which was 27.8% in 2008, declined rapidly to 22% in 2010. The percentage continues to decline in 2023 to 18.25%. The lack of competition in Indonesia's manufacturing industry is also a factor in the number of imported goods made with better quality technology.

b. Education and the influence of social media

Gen Z is a generation that is very concerned about social issues, they will try to work together to voice and positive change in the world. They are literate with world issues also because of the internet and social media. Unfortunately, sometimes Gen Z voices controversial phenomena and they believe in the truth of these things, one example is that some Gen Z thinks that college is unemployment with style (Widuri & Suwarno, 2024)^[11], while education

in Indonesia is still relatively low from all over the world. According from *Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS)* in 2023, young people who continue to college are still 10.15%.

Figure 1. Indonesia's Education Level Data in 2023
Source: bps.go.id

The state budget allocation for education in Indonesia is quite large, about 20% of the total, but the concern is that the return on education is still relatively small, only 5%.

Daerah Tempat Tinggal	Jenis Kelamin	2023						Jumlah
		Tidak/Belum Pernah Sekolah	Belum Tamat SD	SD/ Sederajat	SMP/ Sederajat	SMA/ Sederajat	Perguruan Tinggi	
Perkotaan	Laki-laki	1.27	5.80	19.51	22.55	38.13	12.76	100.00
	Perempuan	2.58	7.43	20.51	22.01	33.80	13.66	100.00
Perdesaan	Laki-laki + Perempuan	1.93	6.62	20.01	22.27	35.95	13.21	100.00
	Laki-laki	3.78	11.39	31.29	24.03	24.15	5.35	100.00
Perkotaan + Perdesaan	Perempuan	6.45	13.39	30.96	22.75	20.13	6.32	100.00
	Laki-laki + Perempuan	5.11	12.39	31.13	23.39	22.14	5.84	100.00
Perkotaan + Perdesaan	Laki-laki	2.32	8.12	24.41	23.16	32.31	9.68	100.00
	Perempuan	4.18	9.90	24.83	22.32	28.15	10.63	100.00
	Laki-laki + Perempuan	3.23	9.01	24.62	22.74	30.22	10.15	100.00

c. Lack of Job Opportunities

Based on 2013 World Bank data, the number of workers in Indonesia is the fourth largest in the world (Suhandi, et al., 2021)^[11]. In today's world, the world of work requires more modern, high-tech, and digital sectors. However, the quality of open unemployment is still not literate in this regard. One of the reasons for this problem is that jobs require high skill labor, rather than workers whose abilities are shared by everyone. As a result, these workers will easily be replaced.

Personal Branding

In fact, everyone already has a personal brand. Someone's impression of us is a form of personal branding that we create in a certain environment. According to Tom Peter's 1997 book, he wrote "You don't 'belong' to any company for life, and your primary affiliation is not with any particular 'trend'. You are not defined by your job title, and you are not limited by your job description. From this day forward, you are a brand." (Rangarajan, et al., 2017)^[10].

Personal branding is strategic, which highlights the outstanding traits of each individual that meet industry expectations. Technology also plays an important role in showcasing personal images, pictures, stories and characteristics on social media platforms. It is essential for career success and makes it easier to get noticed. It helps one to present a professional identity that is tailored to the needs of the company. (Gorbatov, et al., 2019)^[6].

According to data from Rahayu, et al (2024)^[9], the results of a questionnaire involving 116 students in semester 8, the influence of social media, Islamic religious values, and the ability or expertise of young people greatly determines personal branding with a percentage of 64% and career success as much as 59%.

Focus Discussion Group (FDG)

While brainstorming and telling each other what they want to do in the future, here are the results of the FDG conversation conducted on June 19, 2024 with seven 20-21 year old Gen Z interns:

- 5 people expected a salary above the minimum wage after fresh-graduate, and the remaining 2 people even expected to get 2 digits.

- Three of them aspired to pursue higher education, one wanted to find a job abroad, and the rest wanted to find a job.
- They all agreed that it is better to work abroad than domestically, but it is more difficult to get hired. Regional Minimum Wage salaries in remote areas are still lacking and do not even reach the minimum wage set in their respective regions, especially since the biggest one is only in Jakarta, which is 5 million rupiah.
- When asked about the definition of personal branding, they understand it well but they are still not sure about their own branding. Two of them know what their passion is and it may already be their branding, but it is still their own intuition and not sure what others think of them as they want them to be.
- Here is an understanding of personal branding as defined by 4 people:
 - a. “Personal branding primarily serves to distinguish oneself from peers or competitors. It involves creating a unique and memorable impression, so that, for example, as an illustrator, someone might instantly recognize my work even without a signature, thinking, “Hey, isn’t this by X?” Alternatively, even if a piece isn’t mine, the style might remind them of me because of a particular coloring technique or approach, prompting a reaction like, “This really resembles X’s work.” A strong personal brand, in essence, fosters that level of recognition and association.”
 - b. “In my opinion, personal branding is how you want people or your audience to perceive your brand or product as, like your characteristic, your one of a kind style in your product, or even how you promote said product, everything about it has your own unique personality in your product or brand which makes yours stand out and different from others.”
 - c. “A person’s or brand’s identity is crafted to stand out and be easily remembered. This can involve distinct and unique elements, allowing the public to immediately recognize and associate them. For example, Taylor Swift is known for her connection with the color red, while Olivia Rodrigo is associated with purple. Beyond colors, there are iconic logos, like Nike’s “swoosh” or Adidas’ three stripes, which are instantly recognizable and memorable. The use of specific mascots and fonts is also highly effective, as seen with New Jeans, who have their signature bunny mascot and unique font. These elements create a strong, consistent image, enabling people to instantly recognize and remember the identity.”
 - d. “Your characteristic as someone or as a person based on what you're competent in, and also how people see and remember you.”

Interview

Interview with an expert are intended to gain more understanding the reality on working field in Indonesia and how does the recruitment process work. The interview was conducted with Kak Deta, one of the HR (Human Resource) from PT Gramedia Asri Media. The interview took place on July 12, 2024 from 10:00 to 11:00 WIB at Kompas Gramedia Palmerah Barat, West Jakarta.

The following are the new points obtained from the interview:

- Ms. Deta revealed that Gen Z often shows a habit of applying for jobs with various positions, making them seem less focused on one particular field. For example, someone with a Designer background tries to apply as a Store Superintendent.
- This shows that many of Gen Z do not fully understand their interests or professional identity. In addition, Gen Z has a desire to try many things, but the result is a lack of deep expertise in one area.

- The experience in their CVs sometimes does not match the qualifications required by the job. Due to the large number of applicants, every HR uses an Application Tracking System (ATS) to bring up the CVs that best match the job qualifications.
- If a job application has not been responded to, it is likely that the CV submitted is not relevant to the job qualifications, so it is at the bottom of the ATS system. This causes the CV to be less noticed or even not seen by HR because it is outmatched by more relevant CVs.
- Gen Z's work pattern is different from other generations. Gen Z is more likely to work without a strict structure and is more concerned with results than processes, because they are a tech-savvy generation. Everything can be solved by technology.
- They often moves between companies in a short period of time, such as three months, which raises questions for recruiters. Recruiters wonder why applicants declare a mismatch with the company so quickly.
- Applicants who want an above-average salary need to convince recruiters by showing unique values or abilities that other applicants don't have. Applicants must prove that their skills match the requested salary.
- According to Ms. Deta, uploading portfolios on social media is important so that others can see your skills. It would be a shame if the talent is not shown to many people.
- Bachelor's degree and GPA are not absolute requirements, but they are usually the first impression for applicants. Applicants with a low GPA are often assumed to have less ability than those with a high GPA.
- There is a lot of debate about the requirement of experience when applying for a job, while to gain experience one needs to work first. Kak Deta stated that experience is not only gained from working in a company but also from organizations, freelance, projects, and seminars that are relevant to the position being applied for.
- Personal branding is very important for applicants. They must be good at convincing recruiters with real data and results. Applicants must prove that they have expertise in their field of interest.
- Ms.Deta's message for Gen Z is to continue to develop themselves, focus on their interests and goals, and not change their interests too often to stay useful.

Observation of the Gen Ztrive Community

Gen Ztrive is a community of Gen Z members who live in Jakarta. The average age of its members is 13-24 years old. This community has the motto "The 1% Gen-Z Community", which focuses on positive community, self-development and career preparation.



Figure 2. Documentation with Gen Ztrive Members
Source: Gen Ztrive

The main objective of this community is to become a place for Gen-Z to gather, discuss, exchange experiences, support each other & break the negative stigma about Gen-Z. Gen Ztrive holds seminars every Friday and one of the materials is “Gen Z Personal Branding” which is held at one of the cafes located in PIK, North Jakarta.



Figure 3. Gen Ztrive’s Seminar Poster
Source: Gen Ztrive



Figure 4. Documentation with Gen Ztrive Members at PIK
Source: Gen Ztrive

The conclusion of the seminar was that Personal Branding is very important for both academics and careers. In this age that is very attached to social media, personal branding is absolute to help promote the profession & business that Gen Z lives, because how other people see an individual, and how that individual sees himself, it becomes a personal branding of that person.

Interview with one of the Founder Gen Ztrive

This interview aims to understand how other generations view Gen Z. Mr. Oscar, one of the founders of Gen-Ztrive, has been observing the behavior of Gen Z for quite some time. He founded the community to educate Gen Z on how to behave, so that one day they will contribute greatly to the country and also make the nation proud. For Mr. Oscar, who is a nationalist, if the country wants to progress, then a small thing that can be started is to change the mindset of Gen Z who will become the next golden generation. The interview took place on July 12, 2024 from 17.00 to 18.00 WIB at Central Park Mall. Here are some of Mr. Oscar's observations about the characteristics of Gen Z:

- According to Mr. Oscar, Gen Z has advantages such as high technological capabilities and broad horizons. However, the downside is that they are often dubbed the “strawberry generation” who tend to want everything instantly and lack resilience in facing challenges.
- Mr. Oscar also mentioned that Gen Z generally does not understand the importance of developing soft skills that cannot be obtained only at home or school, such as self-branding, self-development, communication skills in the world of work, and ethics in interacting with others.
- Many of these skills are only mentioned briefly in the family or school environment, without any further emphasis.
- The strawberry generation among Gen Z is not entirely their fault; it is also influenced by their parents' over-indulgent upbringing, coupled with better living conditions compared to previous generations.
- According to Mr. Oscar's research, Indonesia still lags behind other countries in terms of education. The high school graduation rate only reaches around 66%, with only 10% continuing on to higher education.
- There are four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful.
- The role of parents is very important in shaping children's mindset and lifestyle, because children are guided by their parents since childhood.
- Being coddled since childhood can make Gen Z grow up to be less resilient, including in the world of work. They tend to complain about work but often underperform, wanting high salaries without being prepared for the process.
- From Mr. Oscar's observations, Gen Z has five main characteristics that distinguish them from other generations, which are:
 1. **Supersmart**
Gen Z has extensive access to knowledge through the internet, which allows them to learn quickly.
 2. **Humanist**
They care deeply about social issues, enjoy participating in volunteer activities, and helping people around them.
 3. **Instant**
They don't believe in long processes. Gen Z often asks why put in the effort if they can learn from the internet. In fact, the process also provides experience and mental strength.
 4. **Inclusive**
They reject discrimination. Gen Z tends to have a certain “circle” or group of friends, who usually have the same habits and social status. This gives rise to the term FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).
 5. **Apolitical**
There are still many Gen Zs who don't really care about politics, and they tend to exercise their voting rights without careful consideration.
- Gen Z has adopted the YOLO (You Only Live Once) mindset, but it is often misinterpreted as “just get on with it.” This makes them put less effort into achieving their goals.

- Important skills that Gen Z needs to have are personal branding and public speaking. Their self-awareness and communication skills have a huge impact on their future career success.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Many Gen Zs still don't know their own personal branding. This is supported by data that states that many Gen Z have not found their intended interests when applying for a job. Personal branding is very important when entering the career world, because in addition to making it easier to add connections, networks that recognize the skills of each Gen Z individual are increasingly recognized by many people. Some ways to recognize Gen Z's personal branding is to focus on a destination point without seeing the path taken is a comfort zone or not. If Gen Z wants to be successful in a career, they must pass or get out of their comfort zone, seek new experiences or lessons, and actively participate in positive organizations or communities. All of these things must of course start from Gen Z's own awareness, daring to change themselves for the better.

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