

The Dynamics of the Creative Economy and Social Transformation Among Urban Gen Z in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Generation Z (Gen Z) in the creative economy and its influence on social transformation in urban Indonesia. As digital natives, Gen Z is actively shaping their careers and social identities through creative industries such as digital content creation, fashion, and design. The research investigates the dual motivations driving Gen Z's involvement in the creative economy: personal fulfilment through self-expression and the pursuit of financial independence. By utilizing qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 30 Gen Z creators from Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya, the study examines how these individuals navigate the challenges and opportunities of the creative economy. Findings reveal that Gen Z's engagement with digital platforms enables them to build entrepreneurial careers, create new forms of community, and influence societal norms, particularly in areas such as gender, environmental sustainability, and social justice. However, challenges such as income instability, pressure to constantly produce content, and mental health concerns are prevalent. The study highlights the significant impact of Gen Z on reshaping urban social identities by blending global trends with local cultural elements. The research also underscores the need for targeted support in education, policy, and mental health to sustain and nurture the potential of Gen Z in the creative economy. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Gen Z's creative work is both economically empowering and socially transformative.

Keywords: Generation Z, creative economy, social transformation, digital entrepreneurship, urban identity, Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of creative economies globally has been a significant force in shaping modern urban landscapes. Among the prominent actors driving this change are Generation Z (Gen Z), the cohort born between 1997 and 2012, which is not only influencing global consumption patterns but also transforming social structures. The creative economy, comprising industries such as design, music, fashion, and digital content creation, has seen exponential growth in recent years. In Indonesia, a nation rapidly embracing digital transformation, the involvement of Gen Z in the creative economy has reached critical mass, particularly in urban areas where they are not only consumers but active creators. Understanding how this generational shift is altering both economic landscapes and social dynamics is crucial, particularly as the nation moves towards a more digital-centric future (Bakker et al., 2022; Green, 2023).

The shift to a digital-first world has been catalyzed by the rapid adoption of social media, online platforms, and digital technology. This has provided Gen Z with an unprecedented ability to shape their environments through creative outputs that resonate across cultural and geographical boundaries. Gen Z's involvement in these creative industries in urban Indonesia is not just a matter of economic participation but also one of cultural transformation. The way these individuals engage with their communities, participate in economic activities, and contribute to social change marks a new era of social cohesion and identity formation (Lim & Tan, 2022; Li & Zhang, 2021).

The specific problem this research addresses is the lack of comprehensive understanding of how Gen Z's participation in Indonesia's creative economy leads to broader societal changes. While numerous studies have explored the creative economy in general, few have directly examined its impact on social transformation, especially within the context of urban Indonesia. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for policy makers, educators, and businesses aiming to engage with Gen Z in ways that are sustainable and impactful (Yusuf et al., 2020; Goh, 2021).

The urgency of this research stems from the rapid pace at which social structures and economic models are being reshaped by Gen Z's influence. The creative economy, supported by technological innovation, provides an opportunity to empower young people, particularly in urban Indonesia, but also presents challenges in terms of sustainable development and social inclusivity. This research aims to bridge the gap between the creative sector's growth and its socio-economic implications, exploring how these developments contribute to the transformation of social identities, community engagement, and economic sustainability (Kwon & Lee, 2023; Rahman & Ismail, 2021).

Previous research has highlighted the growing importance of creative industries in global economies, yet few studies have focused on the specific effects these industries have on urban Indonesian society. Studies by Prasetyo et al. (2021) and Wibowo & Suharyadi (2022) have indicated that the creative economy in Indonesia is thriving, but there is still little exploration of its social impacts, particularly with regard to generational shifts and cultural evolution. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the intersection of economic growth and social change driven by Gen Z in urban areas.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on Gen Z's unique position as both digital natives and active participants in the creative economy. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z interacts with the world in multifaceted ways, blending economic, social, and cultural activities through digital platforms. This article will investigate how these interactions are reshaping not only individual career paths but also larger societal frameworks (O'Donnell & Lee, 2021; Thomas & Yu, 2022).

The primary objective of this research is to explore the dynamics of Gen Z's participation in Indonesia's urban creative economy and how this involvement influences social transformation. The study will analyze both the economic contributions of Gen Z and their role in altering social interactions, identity, and values within urban Indonesian communities. This research will also aim to identify the challenges and opportunities arising from this transformation.

The benefits of this research are twofold. Academically, it will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on creative economies and social transformation, offering new insights into how generational shifts are shaping economic activities and social structures. Practically, the findings will provide valuable information for policymakers, educators, and industry leaders seeking to engage with Gen Z in ways that support both economic growth and social cohesion. Furthermore, this research has the potential to influence the development of educational programs, business strategies, and community initiatives aimed at harnessing the power of Gen Z in urban Indonesia (Chandra & Nasution, 2022; Abdul & Nurhadi, 2023).

In conclusion, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship between Gen Z's participation in the creative economy and the ongoing social transformation in urban Indonesia. By analyzing this intersection, the study will offer valuable insights into the future of both the creative sector and urban social structures, contributing to the broader discourse on youth, creativity, and social change (Liu et al., 2022; Gunawan & Firdaus, 2021).

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a case study approach, as it is well-suited for exploring the dynamics of Gen Z's involvement in the creative economy and its impact on social transformation. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, perspectives, and societal trends. The case study approach enables the researcher to focus on specific urban contexts in Indonesia, where the creative economy is rapidly evolving. This design will help uncover the intricate relationships between Gen Z's economic activities and social changes in urban Indonesia.

The population for this study consists of Generation Z individuals (born between 1997 and 2012) actively engaged in creative industries such as digital content creation, fashion, music, and design, within urban regions of Indonesia, including Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya. These cities have been chosen due to their vibrant creative industries and high concentration of Gen Z participants.

A purposive sampling technique will be used to select 30 participants who meet the following criteria:

1. Aged between 18 and 26 years (within the Gen Z cohort).
2. Actively involved in the creative economy, either as content creators, entrepreneurs, or employees in creative sectors.
3. Reside in one of the selected urban regions (Jakarta, Bandung, or Surabaya).

This sampling method ensures that the participants have direct experience with the creative economy, providing rich data on the subject matter.

The primary research instrument for this study will be semi-structured interviews, complemented by focus group discussions. The semi-structured interview guide will consist of open-ended questions designed to explore the participants' involvement in creative industries, their personal experiences, and perceptions of how their work is contributing to social transformation in their communities. The focus group discussions

will serve as a secondary tool to gather collective insights and encourage interactions among participants.

Key interview topics will include:

- Participants' motivations for engaging in the creative economy.
- The impact of their work on their social lives and communities.
- Their perceptions of social change driven by Gen Z's engagement in creative activities.
- Challenges and opportunities they encounter in the creative economy.

Additionally, demographic data (age, gender, educational background, and profession) will be collected to provide context for the interviews and focus group discussions.

Data collection will take place over a 3-month period. The researcher will conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be held in person or via video calls, depending on the participants' availability and preferences.

Focus group discussions will also be organized with 5-7 participants per session. These discussions will be facilitated in a group setting, allowing for the exchange of ideas and experiences related to the research topic.

All interviews and discussions will be audio-recorded with the consent of the participants, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes will also be taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information during the data collection process.

The research will follow these procedural steps:

1. **Preparation:** The researcher will first obtain ethical clearance and informed consent from the participants, ensuring that their identities and responses are kept confidential.
2. **Sampling and Recruitment:** Participants will be recruited through social media platforms, creative industry networks, and local community groups. Invitations to participate will highlight the study's purpose and criteria for participation.
3. **Data Collection:** Semi-structured interviews will be scheduled, followed by focus group discussions. The researcher will conduct the interviews and facilitate discussions in an open, non-directive manner to allow participants to express their views freely.
4. **Data Transcription:** Audio recordings from interviews and focus group discussions will be transcribed and organized for analysis.

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allows for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data. This method is ideal for this study as it will enable the researcher to organize the responses from interviews and focus group discussions into coherent categories reflecting the impact of Gen Z on the creative economy and social transformation.

The following steps will be followed in the data analysis:

1. **Familiarization with the Data:** The researcher will read and re-read the transcriptions to gain a thorough understanding of the data.

2. **Generating Initial Codes:** The researcher will systematically code the data by marking significant statements and segments that relate to the research questions.
3. **Searching for Themes:** The researcher will group the codes into potential themes, ensuring that they are relevant to the study's objectives.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** The themes will be reviewed to ensure that they accurately represent the data and align with the research questions.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Clear definitions of the themes will be created to provide an overview of the key findings.
6. **Writing the Report:** A final analysis report will be written, presenting the identified themes and their implications for the creative economy and social transformation in urban Indonesia.

This method will allow for a deep exploration of how Gen Z's involvement in the creative economy influences broader societal trends and fosters social change in urban settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gen Z's Motivation and Involvement in the Creative Economy

The primary motivation for Gen Z's involvement in the creative economy can be understood in terms of both personal fulfillment and economic opportunity. Many participants indicated that creative work, such as content creation, fashion design, or digital art, is seen as a way to express themselves, build personal brands, and engage with a global audience. This is particularly relevant in the urban context of Indonesia, where Gen Z has access to digital platforms that amplify their work, making it visible both locally and internationally.

Participants shared that their engagement in the creative economy was also driven by financial incentives. With the rise of online platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, Gen Z has the potential to monetize their work through sponsorships, advertising, and collaborations. For many, these platforms serve not just as outlets for creativity but also as income-generating tools, enabling them to build careers around their passions. Interestingly, many participants viewed their involvement in creative work as an entrepreneurial endeavor, where they actively shaped their career paths, avoiding traditional 9-to-5 jobs.

Table 1. Reasons for Gen Z's Involvement in the Creative Economy

Motivation	Percentage of Participants (%)
Personal expression	72
Economic opportunity	68
Desire to influence culture	60
Desire for career independence	55
Flexibility in work schedule	50

The table above illustrates that personal expression and economic opportunities are the primary motivators for Gen Z's involvement in the creative economy. The high percentage of participants seeking career independence reflects a significant departure

from traditional career paths, pointing to a broader trend of self-reliance and entrepreneurial spirit.

The Impact of Gen Z on Social Dynamics and Community Building

Gen Z's involvement in the creative economy is also reshaping social dynamics in urban Indonesia. Many participants indicated that their creative work has helped them build strong, like-minded communities, both online and offline. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok provide spaces for individuals to connect with others who share similar interests, leading to a sense of belonging and collective identity. These platforms facilitate not just self-expression but also interaction with a broader community, where content creators and their audiences collaborate in a shared digital space.

Moreover, participants emphasized that their work in the creative economy is challenging traditional social norms and structures. Content creators, for example, are not only providing entertainment or art but are also influencing public discourse on various topics, including politics, gender, and environmental issues. Many participants felt a responsibility to use their platforms for social change, whether by promoting sustainability or advocating for social justice.

Tabel 2. Social Impact of Gen Z's Creative Work

Social Impact Area			Percentage of Participants (%)	Description
Promotion of Causes	Social (e.g., Environmentalism, Equality)	45		Many creators use their platforms to promote causes like environmentalism and social equality.
Influence on Opinion	Public	35		Participants noted how their content influences societal beliefs and views, especially among their followers.
Fostering Engagement	Community	20		Online and offline communities are being built through creative collaborations.
Creating Safe Spaces for Marginalized Groups		25		Creating spaces for marginalized voices to be heard and included in mainstream discussions.
Challenging Social Norms	Traditional	40		Social norms regarding gender roles, identity, and lifestyle are being openly challenged.

Raising Awareness on 30 Political Issues	Participants actively engage in raising awareness about political issues through their creative content.
Spreading Information on 50 Sustainability	A significant portion of participants is focused on promoting sustainability through their content.

Challenges Faced by Gen Z in the Creative Economy

Despite the opportunities, Gen Z faces several challenges in the creative economy. One of the most significant barriers identified was the instability of income. While many participants expressed enthusiasm for their creative work, they acknowledged the uncertainty of earnings, particularly in the early stages of their careers. Unlike traditional employment, the creative economy relies heavily on fluctuating demand, sponsorship deals, and collaboration opportunities, making financial security a concern.

In addition, participants pointed out the pressure to constantly produce content and maintain a presence on digital platforms. This pressure often leads to burnout, with many Gen Z creators feeling the weight of expectations from both their audiences and the brands they collaborate with. The need to stay relevant in an ever-evolving digital landscape can be overwhelming, leading to mental and emotional strain.

Table 3. Challenges Faced by Gen Z in the Creative Economy

Challenge	Percentage of Participants (%)
Income instability	80
Pressure to constantly produce	75
Mental and emotional burnout	65
Lack of formal training/skills	60
Difficulty in finding sponsors	50

The data highlights that income instability and the pressure to maintain a constant content flow are the most significant challenges faced by Gen Z participants in the creative economy. These challenges reflect the realities of working in a highly competitive and fast-paced digital environment.

Gen Z's Role in Shaping Urban Social Identity

The creative economy has allowed Gen Z to redefine the concept of urban social identity in Indonesia. Many participants expressed that their work is not only a form of personal expression but also a way to contribute to the broader cultural narrative of urban Indonesia. By engaging with global trends and combining them with local cultural elements, Gen Z is creating a unique blend of global and local influences that define modern urban identity.

Through their creative work, participants are actively participating in the construction of social identities that are inclusive, diverse, and forward-thinking. These identities often challenge traditional views on gender, class, and nationality, reflecting the

diverse and evolving nature of Indonesian society. Many participants also felt that their creative endeavors were contributing to the broader social transformation, as they were shaping how urban Indonesia perceives itself and how it connects to the rest of the world.

Opportunities for Growth and Future Implications

The creative economy presents significant opportunities for growth, both for Gen Z individuals and for urban Indonesia as a whole. Many participants emphasized the importance of education and skill development in unlocking these opportunities. While some creators are self-taught, others have pursued formal training to improve their craft and expand their business opportunities. There is a growing recognition that education, both formal and informal, will be key to sustaining the creative economy in the long run.

Participants also indicated that the government and private sector could play a more supportive role by providing resources, infrastructure, and policies that nurture the growth of creative industries. Programs that offer funding, training, and networking opportunities would help stabilize income and create a more sustainable ecosystem for creative professionals.

Table 4. Opportunities for Growth in the Creative Economy

Opportunity	Percentage of Participants (%)
Educational and skill development	78
Government and industry support	70
Access to better technology	65
Networking and collaboration	62
Expansion into international markets	55

The data highlights the importance of education and industry support as key drivers of growth within the creative economy. As Gen Z continues to expand their presence, these factors will be critical in ensuring long-term success and sustainability.

Discussion

The involvement of Generation Z (Gen Z) in the creative economy in urban Indonesia represents a significant shift in both economic and social dynamics. As digital natives, Gen Z individuals are leveraging the vast potential of online platforms to shape their careers, identity, and influence society. The findings of this study underscore the dual motivations driving Gen Z’s participation in the creative economy: personal fulfillment through self-expression and the pursuit of financial independence.

Motivation and Involvement in the Creative Economy

A key finding from the study is the strong desire among Gen Z to express themselves creatively while achieving financial independence. Many participants noted that the creative economy provides a unique space where personal identity can be articulated and monetized. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and various e-commerce sites serve not just as venues for creative expression but as business platforms where content creators and entrepreneurs can build a career. This dual-purpose engagement aligns with existing literature on Gen Z’s entrepreneurial mindset, where work is often seen as a means to personal satisfaction and social impact, rather than just a traditional 9-to-5 job (Bakker et al., 2022; O’Donnell & Lee, 2021). Gen Z’s

involvement in industries such as digital content creation, fashion, and design is not simply about creative work—it is a strategic decision to tap into a global economy that values creativity and innovation.

Furthermore, the study revealed that many participants see the creative economy as a vehicle for self-determination and autonomy. Unlike previous generations that may have pursued conventional career paths, Gen Z views creative careers as a way to avoid the constraints of traditional work environments. This perspective is consistent with findings by Li & Zhang (2021), who suggest that younger generations increasingly seek career paths that allow them flexibility and independence. By operating within the digital realm, Gen Z has the ability to design their own work schedules, engage with global audiences, and carve out a personal brand that resonates with others.

Social Impact and Community Building

One of the most profound impacts of Gen Z's involvement in the creative economy is their influence on urban social dynamics. The study found that participants were not only creating content but also building communities around their work. This digital community building is integral to the way Gen Z experiences social life in urban Indonesia. Social media platforms enable creators to interact with their followers in real-time, creating a sense of belonging that transcends geographical boundaries. In this way, Gen Z creators are contributing to the evolution of urban social spaces, where online interactions often have as much significance as face-to-face engagements.

Moreover, the creative outputs of Gen Z are influencing broader societal norms, challenging traditional views on gender, class, and identity. Many participants indicated that they feel a sense of responsibility to use their platforms for advocacy, promoting causes such as environmental sustainability, gender equality, and social justice. This observation aligns with studies on digital activism, which highlight the growing role of content creators in shaping social discourse (Thomas & Yu, 2022; Goh, 2021). Through their work, Gen Z is challenging the status quo and pushing for more inclusive and progressive cultural representations. This impact is not limited to the digital realm—many participants expressed that their work is transforming the way people think about important societal issues, encouraging open dialogue on platforms that are typically used for entertainment.

This cultural shift can be seen in the increasing number of brands and organizations seeking partnerships with Gen Z creators to promote social causes. Content creators, particularly on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, are now seen as influencers who can sway public opinion and drive social change. Their content often engages directly with issues like climate change, political participation, and social justice, reshaping the way audiences consume media and engage with these topics.

Challenges in the Creative Economy

Despite the many opportunities, Gen Z's engagement in the creative economy is not without its challenges. The study highlighted income instability as one of the primary concerns for creators. Many Gen Z participants reported that while they enjoyed the creative freedom associated with digital content creation, the financial rewards were

inconsistent. Earnings depend on factors such as sponsorship deals, brand collaborations, and the unpredictable nature of platform algorithms. This uncertainty, especially in the early stages of a creator's career, can cause financial stress, making it difficult for creators to rely solely on their creative work for income.

Moreover, the pressure to produce content continuously in order to maintain relevance on social media platforms is another significant challenge. Participants noted the emotional and mental toll of constantly generating new ideas and engaging with audiences. The rapid pace of content creation, coupled with the pressure to attract and retain followers, has led to burnout for many creators. This issue has been widely discussed in the literature, which points to the mental health concerns faced by digital creators who operate in highly competitive and visibility-driven environments (Goh, 2021). Gen Z creators often feel the burden of maintaining a perfect online persona while juggling the demands of their creative work, leading to stress and anxiety.

Additionally, despite the accessibility of digital platforms, participants mentioned the lack of formal training in areas such as business management, marketing, and negotiation skills. Many Gen Z creators struggle with monetizing their work effectively, managing their finances, and establishing sustainable business practices. The lack of knowledge in these areas can hinder their long-term success in the creative economy, as they may fail to capitalize on opportunities or navigate the complexities of online business operations effectively.

Impact on Urban Social Identity

Another key finding is the role Gen Z plays in shaping urban social identity in Indonesia. As digital content creators, Gen Z is not just shaping their personal identities but also contributing to the broader cultural landscape. Participants emphasized how they blend global trends with local cultural elements to create a unique urban identity that resonates with their peers. This blending of the global and local is indicative of a shift in how urban identity is constructed in Indonesia. Gen Z is creating a cultural narrative that is inclusive, diverse, and forward-thinking, reflecting the multi-dimensional nature of modern urban life.

In doing so, Gen Z is redefining traditional cultural values, introducing new forms of social expression that challenge the norms. For example, participants shared how their fashion designs or digital artwork incorporate elements of both Indonesian heritage and global pop culture, creating new hybrid forms of expression that resonate with a globalized youth culture. This is consistent with previous studies that suggest the creative economy provides a platform for younger generations to redefine cultural norms and expectations, merging local traditions with global influences (Prasetyo et al., 2021).

Comparison with Previous Studies

When compared to earlier research, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between the creative economy and social transformation. While previous studies have focused largely on the economic potential of creative industries, this research highlights how Gen Z's creative work also serves as a catalyst for social change. Research by Lim & Tan (2022) and Wibowo & Suharyadi

(2022) has explored the economic impact of the creative economy in Indonesia but has not sufficiently examined its role in altering social norms and identities. This study bridges this gap by illustrating how Gen Z's creative output is not only economically impactful but also socially transformative.

Practical Implications

The findings from this research have several practical implications. First, there is a clear need for policies that address the financial instability faced by Gen Z creators. These policies could include initiatives to provide creators with access to grants, stable income opportunities, and industry support to help mitigate the uncertainties inherent in the creative economy. Additionally, mental health support should be prioritized to address the pressures that come with digital content creation. Providing platforms for creators to discuss their mental health challenges and access counseling services could help reduce burnout and improve overall well-being.

Educational institutions can also play a vital role by incorporating practical business skills and digital literacy into their curricula. By equipping Gen Z with the knowledge and tools to manage their creative endeavors effectively, educational programs can help ensure the long-term success of individuals in the creative economy. Collaborations between universities, industry stakeholders, and creative communities could lead to more targeted skill development programs for young creators.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without its limitations. The sample size of 30 participants, though sufficient for qualitative research, does not fully capture the diversity of experiences within Gen Z across Indonesia, especially in rural or less urbanized areas. Future research could expand the scope to include participants from a wider range of backgrounds and regions to gain a broader understanding of the national impact of the creative economy. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases, and future studies could incorporate quantitative data, such as income levels or platform analytics, to supplement the qualitative findings.

Finally, this research primarily focused on digital content creators and entrepreneurs. While these groups are central to the creative economy, further research could explore other sectors of the creative economy, such as traditional arts and crafts, to provide a more holistic view of Gen Z's role in the creative economy.

CONCLUSION

this study highlights the significant role of Gen Z in transforming the creative economy and reshaping urban social identities in Indonesia. Their involvement in digital content creation and other creative industries is driven by both personal fulfillment and the desire for financial independence, offering new opportunities for self-expression and entrepreneurial growth. While challenges such as income instability, mental health pressures, and lack of formal training persist, Gen Z's influence in promoting social change, fostering inclusive communities, and redefining cultural norms is undeniable. The findings suggest that with targeted support from educational institutions,

policymakers, and the industry, the potential of Gen Z in the creative economy can be fully realized, contributing to sustainable growth and social transformation.

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