



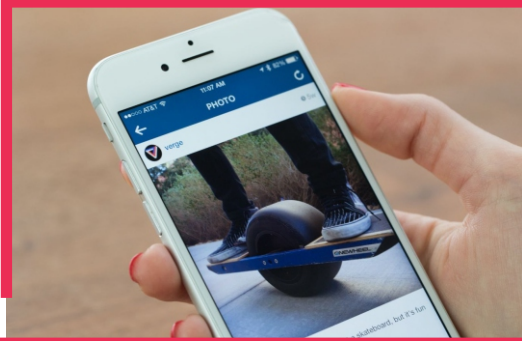
Young Microcelebrities in Indonesia: The Case of Instagram

CfDS Case Study Series #10

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• Introduction •

This case study acknowledges the need to assess the ongoing trend of rising microcelebrity as part of the ever expanding discourse of digital society and digital lifestyle. The everyday basis of this trend is often taken as a mere aspect of pop culture. However, the exposure to the digital lifestyle, in this context by using social media platform, has a lot to offer. It marked how perceptions are being shaped and how powerful social media is in controlling the abstract form of reality, separating physical reality and the hyperreality. We can see a lot of Instagram users are now considered to be equivalent to celebrities in fame, evolving from an unrecognized persona. These so-called microcelebrities are often dubbed to be affecting their mostly young followers in lifestyle. Departing from this, it is interesting to take a deeper look at the role of these young microcelebrities in society, as well as the impact that they possibly bring.

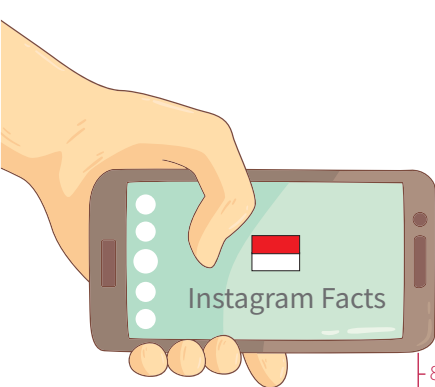




• Instagram in Prominence •

On July 2010, the founders of Instagram, Kevin Systrom, and Mike Krieger released the photo-sharing platform¹. Initially, the application was only available for iOS users. However, it seemed like none of the creators expected such enthusiasm from the society, as in 2016 Instagram passed 500 million users mark worldwide². This application attracted millions of youths all over the world with exciting features such as filters, photo editor, tags, and much more. Since then, Instagram has altered its function from a photo-sharing platform into a much bigger social media giant. Despite the fact that the trend started in the United States, Instagram is considered as a popular application worldwide, as it stands as the 8th most used social media application and the most popular photo sharing application.³





8.6 millions active users

"Selebgram" = Selebriti Instagram/Instagram Celebrity

Most users from the age group of 16-25

Highlighting the particular case of Indonesia, Instagram might have changed many young people's lives. Understanding how influential Instagram is can easily be seen from its growing number of users. According to Statista, in 2016 alone, there are approximately 8.6 million active Instagram users in Indonesia, with the application being the most popular social media platform in Indonesia, second only to Facebook⁴. Forbes pointed out that 62.5% Millennials put great attention to Instagram, by using the platform as a trend source to understand what trend is in and what is out⁵, and that includes Indonesia. According to the data provided by eMarketer, there is a high number of Instagram use in Indonesia which comes from the age group of 16-25 years old with 74% preference on Instagram. The number declines to 60% and 55% in the pool of 26-35 years old⁶. Nowadays, Indonesians are familiarized with invented terms of "selebgram," a combination of celebrity and Instagram. It reckons the famous everyday people who use Instagram in documenting their life and gain popularity for that, with a large number of followers. Additionally, according to the survey conducted by Jakarta Globe, 43% of people from the age group of 16-24 years old put their trust into product advertisements or reviews made by social media influencers much more than other ads⁷. This reiterates how Instagram has gained a solid position as the strong influencer for youths in the country.



• The Road to Fame : Microcelebrity & Celebrification •

There are various definitions on the concept of microcelebrity, the term which will be used in explaining the rise of these social media influencers on Instagram. Though Theresa Sneft links the concept of microcelebrity with identity crisis, she also defines it as the commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded 'good'.⁸ Through this, we can see that a microcelebrity offers a name, a brand, and promise for the consumer regarding who they are as they portray. Therefore, those who are categorized in this concept do not necessarily have to be 'celebrity' (people who dive into the entertainment business), but the concept might be attached to anyone who is committed to their self-branding.

Further, the concept of microcelebrity also captures ways of strategically becoming a microcelebrity; through strategic branding. Khamis, Ang, and Welling point out that social media influencers brand themselves just like commercially branded products. These individuals benefit from having a unique selling point, or a public identity that is singularly charismatic and responsive to the needs and interests of target audiences⁹. Microcelebrity is seen as a new postmodern branding, unlike the conventional idea of celebrity. Their lives and relevance hang on the thread that is social media. More importantly, they must brand or die, putting emphasis on their unique selling point, their identity, and engagement to the society¹⁰. In this case study, we will be focusing on the rise of these young microcelebrities, 15-29 years old people who take part in this particular social media lifestyle and become important influencers to other young people through Instagram.

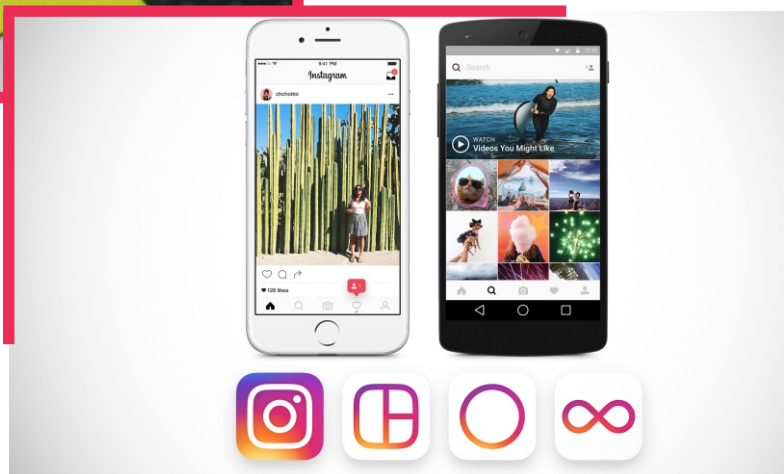


Similar to the concept of microcelebrity, the concept of celebrification also exerts self-marketing and self-branding approaches as the ways to climb the ladders in becoming microcelebrity. As mentioned by Driessens, celebrification is the process by which individuals are transformed into celebrities¹¹. In the context of microcelebrities, becoming celebrities also requires set of self-marketing and self-branding skills. Through posts on their accounts, microcelebrity constructs their image to fit perfectly with the virtual image that they want to be seen as. There are many ways to achieve it all, from creating a sensational representation of their self-image to building anti-mainstream identity, or even to obscuring the reality of their appearance using editing applications. Once microcelebrities gain large audience, there will be a system of 'fan management' which will further amplify the presence of these microcelebrities. In the meantime, to maintain their fame, microcelebrities will become more careful in presenting their images to be consumed by others (Marwick and boyd 2011b; Marwick 2013a; Senft 2013).¹²



• The Microcelebrity Effect •

To better understand the ways microcelebrities affect society in general, we can use the intertwined concepts of blurred lines and hyperreality. These two concepts explain how contents promoted by microcelebrities penetrate to the spectators, and make them want to continuously consume and spread these contents, which will eventually lead to the rising fame of microcelebrities. More importantly, these concepts also help us understand how these contents might as well concretely affect people in their daily lives.





There are many definitions which would describe the condition of hyperreality, the concept which becomes famous among modern thinkers such as Derrida, Baudrillard, and Virilio, especially after the rise of mass media. They see how media controls the spectators while the spectators can not resist the flood of images which somehow can diminish her/his subjectivity and autonomy. Most importantly, the spectators enjoy the condition and somewhat are empowered to the extent of being granted a sense of omnipresence as voyeur, even though they are a passive one¹³. At the same time, social media has blurred the distinction between what's public and what's private along with what's communal and what's personal. The blurred lines of where people interact in social media are what Baudrillard defines as the virtual reality in which humans live in, structured by information and technology, and is sustained on an amalgamation of elements which were previously separate¹⁴. These lines which once stood among what we could and could not see give the room for flooding imagery being portrayed by the social media influencers, where spectators willingly comply with their ideals. The huge flow of imagery and contents in the media that are controlling the spectators are extended by the blurred lines of reality enabled by social media explains the penetration of contents by microcelebrities. In other words, this is how microcelebrities can affect people in real life.



One illustration can be seen from the phenomenon of travel vloggers. These vloggers present 'experience' to their spectators, where the spectators easily surrender to the information. These vloggers upload videos full of excitement and perfect portrayal of good life. This then pushes people also to visit the same place to experience the same excitement or even start their vlogging channels. People also like to follow these accounts to experience the virtual reality, that is experienced 'more real than real.' Further, the interaction between performers and spectators through social media produces a sensational experience where the social media stars feel the sensation of being a celebrity, influencer, or trendsetter, while their followers will perceive all that they see as the truth.



Another illustration lies in the use of social media platform for commercial purposes by these stars. People who gain huge followers base usually take their platforms to advertise products and get money from it. This shows how the phenomenon of microcelebrity has been continuously contributing to the way consumers (especially teenagers and young adults) choose products to consume. As mentioned before, according to the survey conducted by Jakarta Globe, 43% of people from the age group of 16-24 years old put their trust into product advertisements or reviews made by social media influencers much more than other ads¹⁵. In practice, many Instagram users admit that they often visit or follow the account of influencers to get references to items that should be purchased when they are planning to conduct online shopping activities¹⁶. This once again reflects how microcelebrities have the power to give a reference for consumption of their followers (and public in general) or even increase consumption of their behaviours. The fact that becoming microcelebrity has economic benefits also contribute to the rising number of microcelebrities in the past years, as this is an enough motivation for people to pursue this activity.

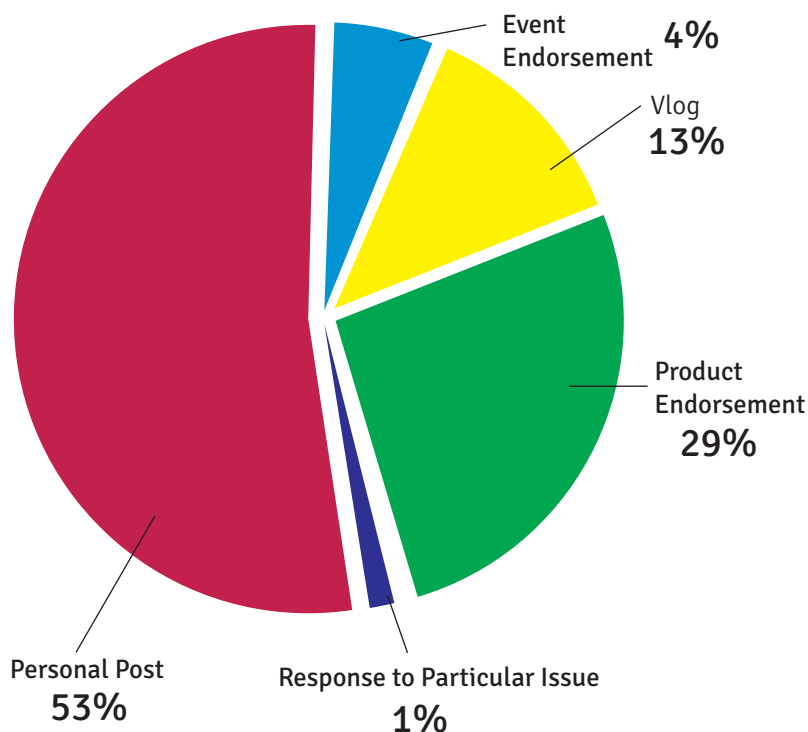




• Indonesian Microcelebrities on Instagram •

After understanding how microcelebrities penetrate to the real life, it is sufficient to see whether Indonesia experiences the phenomenon of microcelebrities as well. As mentioned before, with the prominence of Instagram, apparently microcelebrities also flourish in Indonesia. We take several Indonesian microcelebrities on Instagram and look at their behaviours, portrayed from their contents.

Proportion of Social Media Stars Posts



*Figure 1 - Composition of Social Media Stars' Content in Instagram
(based on the observation of their latest 100 posts in Instagram)*

We managed to conduct simple observation on the behaviors of several young Indonesian microcelebrities on Instagram. The selection of ten samples was done by looking at the amount of their followers, respectively. From the number of the followers, we discover that those are the ten figures who own the highest followers among other. Furthermore, to narrow the scope, we try to focus on social media stars who are still in a school-age (either high school or university) because they have the biggest influence to the fellow Indonesian teenagers and students, who are in the same age-range as them. After the ten samples were chosen, we attempted to do content analysis on their instagram feed by looking at their latest 100 posts. Each of the 10 samples were examined carefully one by one since there are not yet tools which can automatically categorize instagram post based on its theme. This simple observation is portraying enough of the picture we expected to see; the utilization of Instagram by these young microcelebrities.

Based on the observation on ten young, school-age social media stars in Indonesia, there are a variety of themes that they bring on their Instagram feed. 53% of their contents are personal posts. However, this type of personal post has an extremely broad coverage as it is limited to the content that is not aimed at commercial purpose nor promotion. The examples of this personal posts include, for example, photos of their vacations, or any posts other than for-commercial purposes.

Social media stars usually manage their personal branding that is attached to these personal posts. According to Ifan Shepherd, personal branding is an effort by an individual to sell themselves in the market¹⁷. In this type of content, social media stars focus to shape public perception of them. Some social media stars like Brian Immanuel, Kaesang or Devina Aurel use personal posts for random things or feelings, while other social media stars' personal posts are well designed with clearer concept and well-intended purpose.



Based on the observation, 29% of social media stars' contents are intended for paid product endorsement and 4% for paid event promotion. The social media stars are taking advantage over their large amounts of followers, which turn them into an effective and influential figure among the society, or at least for their followers. A research by Giri Arief and Heppy Millianyani discovers that social media marketing – such as Instagram – is influential to affect customer's purchase interest¹⁸. In Indonesia, Instagram has transformed from a photo sharing app into a social media marketing tool used by small-medium enterprises effectively. Here, social media stars locate themselves as a bridge between seller and buyer through a series of promotional activity. Therefore, it can be seen based on the observation that social media stars in Indonesia who use Instagram largely use their accounts for commercial purposes, beside personal purposes. Furthermore, from the case of Indonesia, it is observed that microcelebrities in Indonesia are also experiencing the same pattern of self-branding and self-marketing. They are reiterating the kind of penetration that enforces the society in general.





• Positive Impacts of Microcelebrity •

Social Media Stars as a Catalyst within E-commerce Industry in Indonesia

Instagram influencers play the significant role in paving digital commerce ecosystem in the country. According to the survey conducted by Jakpat, 53% out of 1003 respondents are using Instagram for shopping purpose. The same report also indicates that 73% of the Instagram user in Indonesia opens their account daily. This becomes a very good medium for digital commerce, as microcelebrities use Instagram for promoting and advertising products. They are involved in the whole process of the marketing campaign for this commercial purposes. Hence, they contribute to the activity of product branding. People, at least Indonesians, start to cite Instagram when they look for product reviews, as mentioned previously on the survey conducted by Jakarta Globe and the findings from our simple study on Indonesia's Instagram stars. The mentioned research by Giri Arief and Heppy Miliyanyi also underlies the rising influence of Instagram in affecting customers' purchase interest. Now, information about a product can spread wildly in the market, including Instagram. As a result, people now can get more freedom and viewpoints over the market and the commodity. Deriving from these facts, on how people start to put more attention on Instagram for consumption purposes, the e-commerce industry eventually will also receive fresh air in the ways they can market their product. They could only market products through conventional ways (stores, markets, kiosks, even mall) which spike their marketing expenditures. New ways of marketing that are made available by these social media stars shall be considered by e-commerce players when they intend to increase their products' selling points and expand their markets.



Social Media Stars as a Catalyst within E-commerce Industry in Indonesia

The emergence of social media stars can also be interpreted positively as a practice of strategic use of social media by the younger generation of Indonesia. Social media stars can be seen as a symbol to ignite creativity and courage of young people to keep innovating. The trend of 'vlogging' should not be underestimated; there is an increasing number of video being uploaded to YouTube as much as 600% in Indonesia since the rise of 'vlogging' trend¹⁹. If this phenomenon is responded positively and accommodated well by many parties, the number of active and creative Indonesian youth could grow rapidly.

Furthermore, those social media stars are also embracing the idea of youth entrepreneurship in Indonesia. The case of youth entrepreneurship in Indonesia is a big potential, yet it is not well-polished. President Joko Widodo himself encourages Indonesian youth to compete in the entrepreneurship world, especially during the ASEAN Economic Community by saying that Indonesia only has one choice to open their market as similar as the neighboring country and here, the youth will be the leader in expanding and protecting Indonesia's competitiveness²⁰. Most of the social media stars possess their own business although they are still in school. Ria Yunita or famously known as Ria Ricis (21) is one of the examples of young entrepreneurs in Indonesia who is taking advantage over the penetration of social media. Through Instagram, she intensively promotes her own Islam-themed fashion and cosmetics business which generates her millions of rupiah every month²¹. Reflecting on the success of the social media stars in developing their business with a unique idea, it is hoped that the number of youth entrepreneur in Indonesia will increase significantly in the coming year.

• Negative Impacts of Social Media Stars •

The emergence of hyper-reality life

Although it is self-taught, what is done by social media stars is certainly accompanied by a strategy that can boost their image to become more popular among its fans. Once being observed carefully, social media stars tend to reveal one side of life through vlog content that displays the excitement and enjoyment of life. Then, not surprisingly, when many of them, or followers, put the hashtag #lifegoals or #relationshipgoals by tagging along these the social media stars. The contents that are generated by social media stars seemingly illustrate that their life is a reality that is ideally undertaken to get a 'happy life.' For their followers, who incidentally are teenagers who are still figuring out their identity, that pseudo-reality of 'happy life' is embedded in their mind and gradually becomes a tangible reality.

The situations can be described as a hyper-reality life. Guy Debord see this phenomenon in his famous book "the society of the spectacle" that the reality that we see in our daily lives is the result of commodification committed by certain parties²². Hyper-reality life can make us become too obsessed with our life in the social media and can make us easily frustrated with the real life. One the most known tangible harm of hyperreality life is the case of Tallulah Wilson, who committed suicide because of her dissatisfaction that nobody ever cared about her in real life, unlike what she had in the online world²³. Or also the tragedy of Danny Bowman, a young Briton who committed suicide because of his frustration over imperfect selfie²⁴. In Indonesia, probably the apparent negative effect of hyper-reality life is when some teenagers are killed in accidents when they become too ignorant with their surrounding when they take selfie (also known as the 'deathly selfie' case)²⁵. Therefore, the emergence of hyper-reality in the lives of teens would be worrisome.



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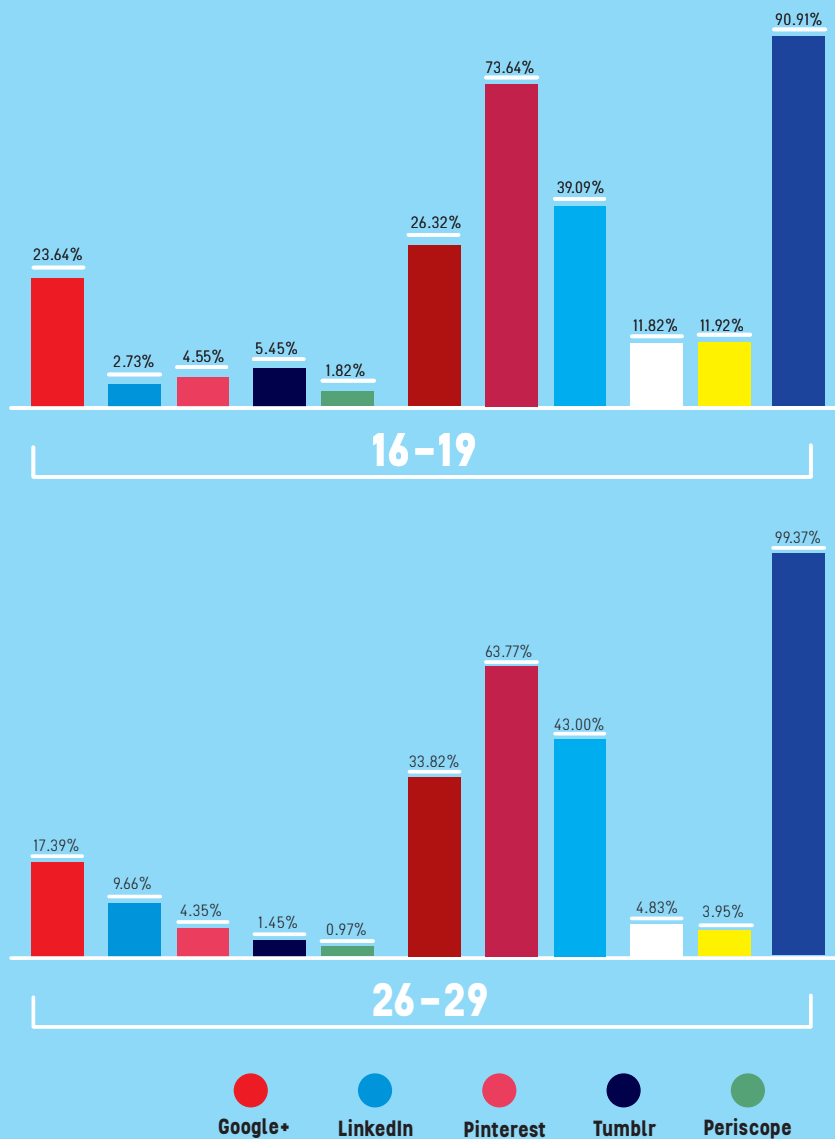
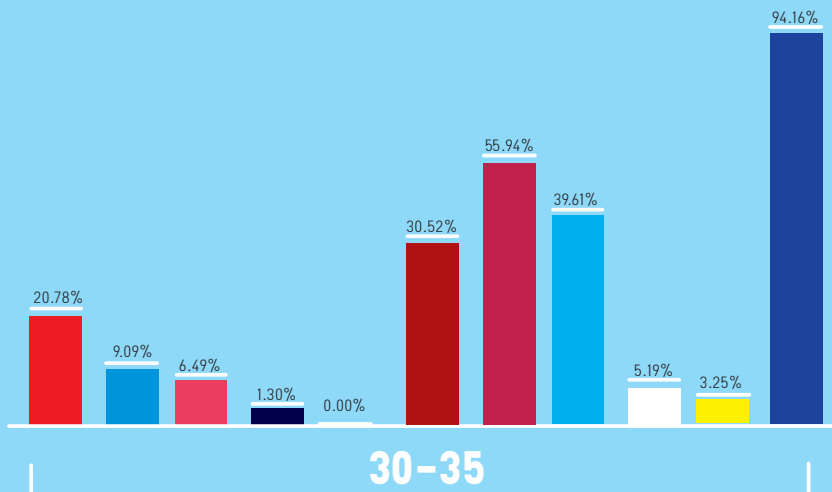
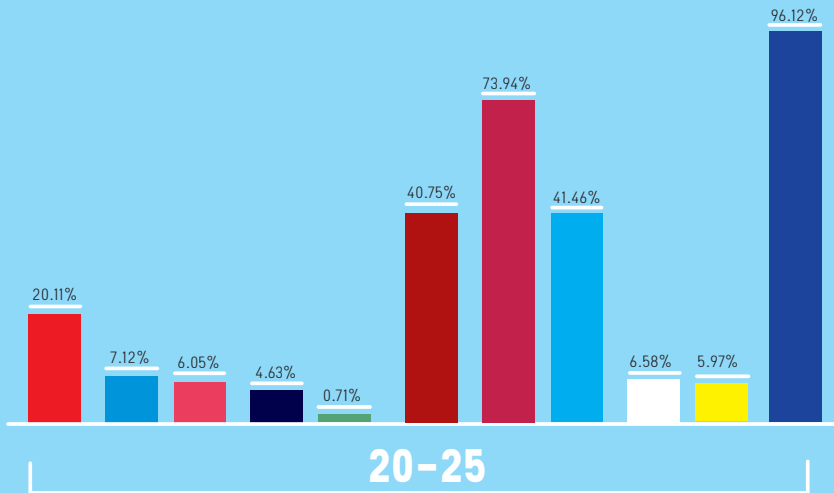


Figure 2 - The Proportion of Social M

PAST WEEK (DIVIDED PER AGE RANGE)



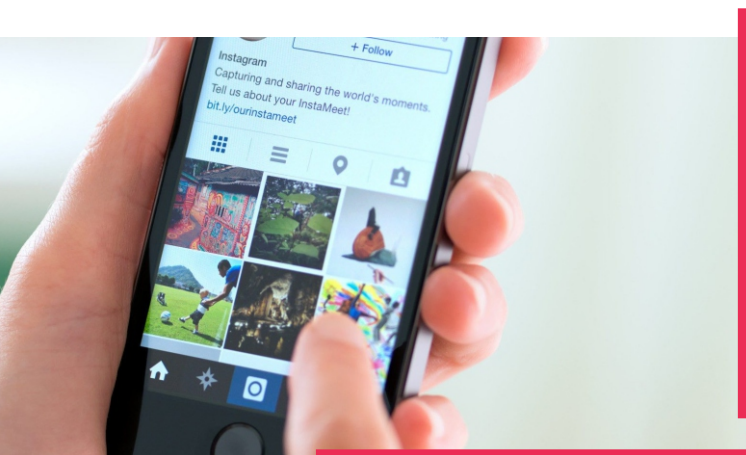
● YouTube
 ● Instagram
 ● Twitter
 ● Other
 ● Snapchat
 ● Facebook

Media use by User based on Age Range



The Shift of Cultural Value among Indonesian Youth

For some millennials who are already exposed to Western culture, the stiffness norms in Indonesia are an obstacle that may interfere with them in the future. One of the controversial social media stars, Karin Novilda, or famously known as 'Awkarin' insists that she will not change her considerably unusual approach toward social media because it is related with her freedom of speech/expression²⁶. Freedom of speech is an important component, but if it practiced without clear boundaries, it can provide negative influence to the surroundings. In the case of social media stars, they often deploy content on Instagram that could be considered sexually or culturally vulgar. The problem is, the majority of their followers are teenagers. From research conducted by Jakpat, as shown on figure 2 previously, it can be seen that almost 73% of Internet users aged 16-19 years use Instagram regularly²⁷ and therefore, there is a chance that these younger generation is exposed to bad influence. Especially, considering the lack of sex education among Indonesian youth, what is done by the social media stars can erode the norms and values entrenched in Indonesia. The negative nuances of the content carried by the social media stars are feared to affect behavioural change among the younger generation of Indonesia.





• Conclusion •

Social media gives a new form of transparency within the society. This is not only used to connect among each other, but also to blur out the limitations of public and personal space. It gives a discursive room to understand new forms of digital interactions and how perspectives are being shaped. Despite the criticism on hyperreality and the uprising microcelebrities portrayal of wrongly-described lifestyle, social media microcelebrities—aside from their gimmicks—play an important role in the increasing creativity of Indonesian youths. Social media allows youths to express themselves and provide rooms for exploring their creativity. Youths nowadays are more adept at using social media and integrating technological innovations in their everyday life. However, privacy and sharing guidelines are just equally important. There should be limits between amusement, entertainment, and personal information—to the extent of how people should navigate through the amount of information in the thick of social media; especially knowing how to differentiate the reality that happens outside of the digital world and what is shown in the social media.

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