

Gen Z career conundrum

Social media influencers, seeking recognition, glamour and sweet commercial endorsements, percolate on narcissistic exhibitionism.

We averred earlier that this inane culture is a bane to society, so we regret this update: it is far worse.

Now, the wellbeing of the nation is at stake. A 2019 **Statistics Department** poll on the Gen Z crowd who sat for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia elicited a vexing causatum: 72.1 per cent cite social media influencing and e-hailing driving as desirous careers.

Only 170,000 out of 560,000 diploma-holders furthered their studies, while the rest abandoned college, diving into the labour pond that authenticated this seismic movement as an unstoppable socio-economic inflection.

The idea is pragmatic and intoxicating: make it big and luminous, preferably supervising a fat bank account, in a period shorter than ploughing through university semesters. Through this inflection, participants, accumulatively, earn more income than they ever would from conventional careers. Then there is this conundrum: a vanishing supply of quintessential professionals and technocrats, degree-holders who the gig economy couldn't care less about. In shooting for the stars, this new epoch replicates an old one: rejecting gruelling but lower-paid careers.

Malaysians won't be caught dead toiling menial jobs that require boots on the ground and daily exposure to the elements. They anathematise the construction, plantation and service industries, inadvertently opening up the cataclysmic influx of eager foreign workers. Job vacancies snowball, but with little traction, so employers loudly bray: where are the fresh graduates? The bewitching gig economy retards Malaysia's fragile development, the extent depending on abandonment of career orthodoxy. Discomfiting arguments in the poll avowed that universities are a "wasteland". The convictive parts: instant gratification as gig platforms offer faster and remunerative commissions, fuelled by social media, and the belief that excellent academic results can't even secure an under-qualified job pestered by innumerable applicants.

The hedonistic lifestyle greased by fast money means dumping employer-pleasing resumes or scanning for job vacancies. So what's an employer to do? Adopt the anathemised industries' playbook: hire foreigners to fill the crater. It's inevitable.

Potential recruits are pre-occupied with adulating adoring fans or merrily driving passengers and ferrying food and parcels. Intriguing downstream enterprises abound: demand for fashion stylists, speech coaches or even Svengalis managing the influencers.

Then there's the accidental offshoot: influencers and e-hailers are the new arms of political activism, organised by parties thrilled with a voter repository they control.

The gig economy is abrasively disruptive, just like when the Internet crushed brick-and-mortars, print and social mores. Naturally, not all the 72 percenters possess ability or talent to hog blandishment, but they will die trying to be next social media phenomenon.

<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/leaders/2022/11/851487/nst-leader-gen-z-career-conundrum>