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Digital Influence on Educational Trajectories: How Social Media Influencers Shape Career Aspirations of Gombak's Upper Secondary Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on the career aspirations of upper secondary students in Gombak, Malaysia. Specifically, it explores how students' educational trajectories are shaped by digital influence, focusing on factors such as the credibility of influencers, the alignment of their messages with students' career goals, and the influence of family or school support. A total of 437 students from various secondary schools in Gombak participated in a structured survey to assess their exposure to social media influencers and perceptions of their influence on career decisions. The findings reveal that while students admire and draw inspiration from influencers, they exhibit a critical approach to making career decisions. Although they are curious about influencer-promoted career paths, they tend to prioritize more conventional routes, often questioning the authenticity of success portrayed online. The study underscores the importance of media literacy and career guidance programs to help students navigate influencer-driven content and make informed educational choices. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of social media on students' career readiness and overall workforce preparation.

1. Introduction

In the past few years, social media influencers have become known as significant agents of transformation, considerably influencing their followers' thoughts, opinions, and actions. This phenomenon is especially noticeable among students, who represent a significant percentage of the digital public. Social media influencers, who have vast followings and substantial influence over their audiences, have emerged as an important component in this field, as noted by Olebara *et al.*, [1]. The growing number of influencers in the lives of students has brought new dynamics into the fields of academic aspirations and educational decision-making, making it an increasingly popular subject among educators, policymakers, and researchers.

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Social media platforms including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube offer influencers an extensive audience, allowing them to express viewpoints, exchange experiences, and advocate lifestyles that are appealing to younger viewers. The growth of social media platforms has drastically affected how people, especially students, interact with and acquire information, as discussed by Talaue *et al.*, [2]. These influencers frequently act as examples or sources of inspiration for students, providing insights on career possibilities and academic pathways. Nevertheless, this influence is not without complications. Although some influencers promote educational materials, successful academics, and continuous education, others may unintentionally create unreasonable expectations or highlight insignificant measures of success, influencing students' academic goals and aspirations.

Social media influencers have a significant impact on students' educational decision-making processes. These influencers' suggestions and testimonials tend to be influential in decisions ranging from selecting educational institutions to discovering alternate paths of study. Influencers' underlying beliefs and principles may affect students' personal preferences and concerns. Recent studies have shown that social media influencers can have a substantial impact on students' academic goals and educational decisions. Many students now rely on social media platforms for information and guidance, and they frequently seek advice from influencers on a variety of topics, including career and academic decisions, as shown by Hasan *et al.*, [3]. Acknowledging this simultaneous impact—both beneficial and probably negative—is critical for analysing how students manage their educational paths in a time driven by digital connections.

The tendency to replicate the way of life and educational pursuits of popular social media influencers may impact students' academic goals, leading them to make educational choices that may not be in line with their personal preferences or capabilities. Furthermore, the uncontrolled nature of the social media influencer promotion phenomenon and the receding of the lines between authentic material and paid testimonials may restrict students' capacity to make informed judgments, as noted by Goanța and Ranchordás, [4]. As social media's influence grows, it is critical to comprehend the complex processes at play and the potential consequences for students' growth as learners and as individuals. This study examines the impact of social media influencers on students' academic aspirations and decision-making. It aims to provide insights into the underlying processes of influence, the implications for educational outcomes, and potential solutions that take advantage of the positive aspects of influencer culture while minimizing negative consequences.

1.1 Literature Review

The increasing engagement of social media influencers in teenagers' lives has sparked significant interest in their role in shaping aspirations and decision-making. Arora *et al.*, [5] emphasized that social media influencers are pivotal in creating trust and engagement, particularly among younger audiences, highlighting their sway over consumer behaviours and attitudes. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in understanding career and educational aspirations.

Guo *et al.*, [6] explored influencer marketing in the leisure food industry, revealing its capability to shape consumer intent, which parallels its potential to influence educational and career-related decisions. Similarly, Shepherd *et al.*, [7] identified a correlation between exposure to deviant influencers and teenagers' inclination toward riskier consumer choices, underscoring the dual-edged nature of this influence.

Campbell and Farrell [8] delved into the functional components of influencer marketing, demonstrating how it affects decision-making processes. Their findings suggest that influencers often serve as role models, directly impacting teenagers' values and career choices. Wongkitrungrueng and

Assarut [9] further asserted that live-streaming builds consumer trust, a quality transferable to influencing career aspirations.

From an educational perspective, Sun *et al.*, [10] highlighted how interactive engagement with influencers fosters critical thinking among teenagers. This aligns with the broader notion of influencers shaping intellectual curiosity and professional ambition. Abidin and Ots [11] explored the dilemma influencers face between credibility and commercial interests, noting that teenagers often idealize these figures, aspiring to emulate their success. Huang [12] examined oral communication strategies used by influencers, illustrating their role in creating relatable content that resonates deeply with younger audiences. This not only promotes consumer behaviours but also shapes aspirational goals. Beibei [13] extended this discussion to the economic and social dynamics of influencer culture, asserting its impact on broader societal trends, including career perceptions.

Furthermore, Li and Adnan [14] explored the intercultural impact of influencers, shedding light on their potential to broaden teenagers' career perspectives by exposing them to diverse fields and practices. White and Hanley [15] examined the role of mental health influencers, demonstrating how their guidance can empower teenagers to make informed decisions about their academic and career paths.

In summary, the literature highlights the profound impact of influencers on shaping teenagers' aspirations and decision-making processes. These findings underscore the importance of understanding influencers' roles in molding educational and career pathways, particularly in contexts like Gombak District, where media consumption is prevalent among youths.

1.1.1 Social Media Influencers and Academic Aspirations

Although the majority of existing literature and mainstream media focuses on social media influencers partnering with brands, there is a notable lack of research examining influencers affecting students' academic aspirations. This gap in research highlights the need to explore how influencers, particularly those promoting educational content, impact students' academic aspirations, as noted by Watkins, [16], p. 73. However, in the past few years, the study on social media influencers and students has gradually attracted academic attention. Tallon *et al.*, [17] conducted a study focusing on the role of intimacy between social media influencers and their followers among 201 students from two universities. The study explored how intimacy moderates the interaction between influencers and followers. They found that attractiveness and likeability positively predict attitude towards influencers. This suggests that the level of intimacy between social media influencers and followers can significantly impact consumer behaviour.

Social media influencers such as local educators or professionals can act as role models by sharing their own educational experiences and career pathways, which may encourage students to pursue higher education. Research by Lu, [18] on the effect of influencers on high school students found that influencers do have impressive impacts on high school teenagers. They have increased the desire of school teenagers to buy products promoted, view entertainment videos on social media instead of watching TV programs, and influence values and standpoints. Thus, academic influencers are encouraged to present on social media and share their own academic journeys, showing their followers academic success that may lead to positive academic aspirations among secondary school students.

Unfortunately, some influencers may unintentionally downplay the importance of academics by focusing more on fame, luxury, materialism, and promoting success without any academic qualifications. This could potentially skew students' priorities, causing them to undervalue the significance of academic achievement. According to a study by Nava *et al.*, [19], "social media

influencers have become an integral part of the daily lives of millions of people worldwide, especially among the younger generations since these personalities are always available in the online community, which has significantly influenced the opinions, choices, and behaviours of the audience.” This emphasis on showing irrelevant academic qualifications to success affects students’ academic aspirations.

According to a study done by the UCSI University Poll Research Centre, among those who chose not to continue their studies, 34 percent expressed an interest in becoming influencers and social media affiliates, 26 percent were drawn to the gig economy, such as e-hailing, 22 percent planned to start their own businesses, and 8 percent had no specific future plans, as reported by Bernama, [20]. Excessive time spent on social media and viewing short videos has led them to seek immediate employment opportunities, with the perception that academic qualifications no longer guarantee secure or desirable job prospects. Assoc Prof Dr. Zainal Madon, Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies, Industry, and Community Relations at the Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, stated that the younger generation is drawn to the appealing and glamorous lifestyle of celebrity influencers, who can earn substantial income through their social media posts, as reported by Bernama, [20]. They perceive a career as a social media influencer and doing online business as a rapid path to wealth and success, offering financial gains without the associated burden of student loan debt.

1.1.2 How Social Media Influencers Impacted Students Educational Decision-Making

In the digital age, social media influencers have become pivotal figures in shaping the opinions and behaviours of young individuals. Chew, C. Y., & Surat, S. [21] have looked into the connection between teenage self-esteem and exposure to social media influencers. The degree of exposure to influencer content and self-esteem levels did not significantly correlate, according to a study conducted on teenagers between the ages of 15 and 18. This implies that adolescents' perceptions of themselves are not always negatively impacted by high exposure.

Wohn *et al.*, [22] highlighted that students can reach a wider network of people who can provide informational help about different occupations using social media platforms. Social media engagement with these networks has been linked to better expectations of college achievement and higher levels of efficacy about college admission processes for first-generation students.

Lu [18], discovered that it makes sense that influencers online disputes could draw more attention. Undoubtedly, students who hear too many diverse voices may become confused or, worse, unintentionally learn about violence and other topics. However, from the perspective of fostering critical thinking, this abundance of viewpoints may encourage teens to question rather than naively accept what they have been taught.

Harun *et al.*, [23] reported that social media influencers have an impact on students' attitudes and learning behaviours in addition to institutional selection. Adolescents' selections of social media influencers, depending on personality and credibility, have a substantial impact on their beliefs, lifestyle, and information acquisition. This implies that social media influencers have the power to influence students' learning styles as well as what they learn.

Chin [24] study looked at how university students' inclinations to buy beauty care products were affected by social media influencers that appeared in the ads. Although the emphasis of this study was consumer behaviour, the findings about personality and credibility are relevant to educational settings since students may also be influenced by social media influencers when making academic decisions.

According to a study by Subramaniam [25], qualities like knowledge, reliability, and beauty have a big impact on Malaysian university students' intents to buy, which suggests that these aspects might also have an impact on their choice of school. Students are more inclined to take influencers' recommendations for schooling seriously when they believe they are informed and reliable.

Jamil [26], explored the impact of an influencer can be increased if peers are perceived to be supporting or following social media influencers. According to findings, peer interactions surrounding influencer content on social media platforms can affect students' motivations and choices, especially those pertaining to their education.

2. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design, utilizing structured surveys to examine the influence of social media influencers on the career aspirations of upper secondary students in Gombak. Quantitative research is appropriate for this study as it allows for the collection of numerical data that can be analyzed statistically to identify patterns, relationships, and trends which was mentioned by Creswell [27]. Surveys are particularly effective in educational research as they enable the collection of standardized responses from a large population, ensuring objectivity and comparability highlighted by Clark *et al.*, [28]. The methodology is divided into three key sub-sections:

2.1 Research Design and Participants

A survey-based approach was used to collect data from 437 upper secondary students enrolled in various schools in Gombak. The respondents were selected using stratified random sampling, a technique that ensures a proportionate representation of students across different school types (public, private, religious) and academic streams (science, arts, technical). Stratified sampling is particularly useful in educational research as it minimizes selection bias and enhances the generalizability of findings, as noted by Latpate *et al.*, [29].

The sample size was determined based on Krejcie and Morgan, [30] sample size formula, which is widely used in social science research to ensure adequate representation of a given population. Given the total population of upper secondary students in Gombak, a sample of 437 participants meets the statistical requirements for reliable data analysis, as outlined by Krejcie and Morgan, [30].

2.2 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was designed to assess students' exposure to social media influencers, their career aspirations, and their perceptions of influencer credibility. The survey instrument was adapted from existing studies on digital influence and career decision-making, as discussed by Kapoor *et al.*, [31] and Oguguo *et al.*, [32], ensuring its validity and reliability.

This study measured three key concepts: credibility of influencers, alignment with students' goals, and family or school support.

1. **Credibility of Influencers:** Students' perceptions of influencer trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity were assessed using survey items such as "I trust the career advice shared by influencers I follow." A 5-point Likert scale was used for responses.

2. **Alignment with Students' Goals:** This was measured by asking students how closely they felt influencer-promoted career paths aligned with their own aspirations. Items included "The career paths promoted by influencers align with my own aspirations."
3. **Family or School Support:** The influence of family and school on career decisions was assessed with questions like "My family encourages me to pursue career paths that align with my education." Responses were recorded on a Likert scale.

The questionnaire was administered in a supervised setting within schools to enhance data accuracy and minimize response bias. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by educational researchers and career guidance experts, aligning with recommendations by Bolarinwa, [33] on survey validation.

2.3 Data Analysis

To ensure the reliability of the findings, the data collected from the survey were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, a widely used software in educational and social science research, as noted by Pallant, [34]

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** Basic descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and their responses to survey items. This provided an overview of the patterns and trends in students' perceptions of influencers, alignment with career goals, and family or school support.
2. **Inferential Statistics:** Chi-square tests were used to examine potential associations between the key variables (credibility of influencers, alignment with students' goals, and family or school support) and students' career aspirations. This test allowed us to determine whether the observed relationships were statistically significant.
3. **Heat Map Analysis:** A heat map was generated to visually represent the strength of relationships between variables such as influencer credibility, alignment with students' goals, and career aspirations. The heat map was used to provide an intuitive visualization of how strongly each factor influences students' career decision-making. Warmer colors indicated stronger associations, while cooler colors suggested weaker correlations. This technique helped to highlight which variables had the most significant influence on students' career choices. The heat map was created using SPSS and Python's Seaborn library, following best practices in data visualization for educational research, as discussed by McKinney, [35].
4. **Reliability Testing:** The internal consistency of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which measured the reliability of the scales used in the survey. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or higher indicated acceptable reliability, as stated by Taber, [36].

These statistical techniques were chosen to provide a comprehensive analysis of the data and to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's findings. This aligns with previous studies that highlight the growing influence of digital platforms on youth career exploration, as shown by Duffett, [37].

3. Results

3.1 Reliability Statistics

Firstly, the reliability of the measurement scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The overall Cronbach's Alpha for the 20-item scale was 0.899, which is considered to have good reliability. This value indicates high internal consistency among the items, suggesting that the statements consistently measure the underlying construct of social media influencers' impact on students' educational and career decisions. The high Cronbach's Alpha also implies that respondents interpreted the questions similarly, ensuring the credibility and reliability of the findings. This level of consistency is crucial for studies examining attitudinal and perceptual variables, as it confirms the robustness of the scale used.

Table 1
Reliability using Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Interpretation
0.899	20	Good Reability

3.2 The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Student Decision-Making

Secondly, the analysis provides insightful observations through the examination of means and standard deviations, using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree). The mean scores reveal nuanced perceptions of social media influencers' impact on educational decisions. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement "I am curious about the strategies that social media influencers use to promote certain educational institutions or pathways" (Mean = 2.93, SD = 0.77), suggesting a strong curiosity among students regarding the marketing tactics used by influencers, which could be attributed to the growing presence of educational endorsements on digital platforms. Similarly, "I am interested in learning more about how social media influencers shape the educational choices of students" (Mean = 2.87, SD = 0.77) reflects a high level of interest, indicating that students are keenly aware of the influential role these digital figures play in shaping perceptions of educational opportunities. Conversely, the lowest mean score was observed for "If I had to choose an educational institution to further my education, I would consider the one recommended by social media influencers over anybody else" (Mean = 2.4, SD = 0.75), highlighting a cautious approach to making critical educational decisions solely based on influencers' endorsements. This suggests that while influencers have significant persuasive power, students maintain a level of independence in making educational choices, possibly due to the awareness of biases in sponsored content. The moderate mean scores for "The social media influencers I follow have a significant impact on my educational track decisions" (Mean = 2.44, SD = 0.83) further supports this, indicating that influencers' impact is substantial but not decisive. Additionally, the statement "I would probably consider attending any educational institution suggested by the social media influencers I follow" (Mean = 2.73, SD = 0.68) reflects a measured openness to influencers' suggestions, likely influenced by the perceived credibility and relatability of the influencers. The overall pattern suggests that students perceive influencers as informative and relatable sources, yet they maintain critical thinking when it comes to educational decisions. These findings highlight the complex dynamics between digital influence and educational trajectories, suggesting that while social media influencers inspire curiosity and provide guidance, students exercise discernment in making educational choices.

Table 2

Influence of social media influencers on students' educational decisions

		N Valid	Missing	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
1.	I am likely to take any educational advice given by the social media influencers I follow.	439	0	2.82	0.72	1	4
2.	I would probably consider attending any educational institution suggested by the social media influencers I follow.	439	0	2.73	0.68	1	4
3.	If I had to choose an educational institution to further my education, I would consider the one recommended by social media influencers over anybody else.	439	0	2.4	0.75	1	4
4.	I have a positive attitude towards educational institutions suggested by social media influencers.	439	0	2.86	0.63	1	4
5.	Before deciding on my future in education, I will compare viewpoints from various social media influencers.	439	0	2.71	0.81	1	4
6.	The social media influencers I follow have a significant impact on my educational track decisions.	439	0	2.44	0.83	1	4
7.	I believe that social media influencers have a powerful influence on the choice's students make regarding their education.	439	0	2.72	0.76	1	4
8.	I think that social media influencers can help guide students to make informed decisions about their educational future.	439	0	2.75	0.75	1	4
9.	I am interested in learning more about how social media influencers shape the educational choices of students.	439	0	2.87	0.77	1	4
10.	I am curious about the strategies that social media influencers use to promote certain educational institutions or pathways.	439	0	2.93	0.77		4

Based on the heat map of mean scores in Figure 1 and the detailed analysis of students' perceptions regarding the influence of social media influencers on educational trajectories, several key conclusions can be drawn. The findings reveal that while students demonstrate a significant curiosity about how social media influencers promote educational pathways and express an interest in learning about the impact on educational choices, they maintain a level of discernment in making personal educational decisions. Higher mean scores for curiosity-related statements indicate that students are engaged observers, critically analysing the strategies used by influencers. However, the lower mean scores associated with considering influencers' recommendations as primary determinants for choosing educational institutions highlight students' cautious approach to major educational decisions, suggesting a balance between influence and independence. The heat map visually emphasizes this complexity, with warmer colours corresponding to higher curiosity and interest, while cooler shades reflect scepticism towards adopting influencers' educational endorsements. These insights illustrate a nuanced digital influence dynamic, where influencers serve as significant yet non-dominant figures in shaping educational aspirations. Ultimately, this study underscores the need for educational stakeholders to recognize the influential yet non-authoritative

role of social media influencers, paving the way for informed and balanced educational decision-making among students in Gombak's upper secondary schools.

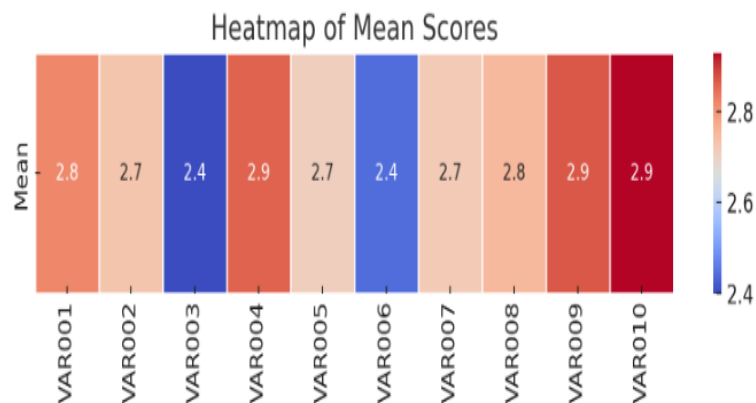


Fig 1: Heatmap Table 2

3.3 Role Models in Social Media: Influence on Career Aspirations

The analysis of the mean scores and standard deviations for the statements assessing the influence of social media influencers on educational and career perceptions among Gombak's upper secondary students reveals diverse attitudes. Using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree), the highest mean score was observed for the statement "I admire social media influencers who are successful even without high education level" (Mean = 3.2, SD = 0.76), indicating a strong admiration for unconventional success, possibly reflecting a shifting value system where academic credentials are not seen as the only pathway to success. In contrast, the lowest mean was recorded for "I believe I can be successful without tertiary education" (Mean = 1.77, SD = 0.91), suggesting a prevailing belief in the importance of higher education despite the admiration for influencers' non-traditional success. The moderate mean for "I follow and often view my favourite social media influencers' career and activities" (Mean = 2.71, SD = 0.81) indicates consistent engagement, highlighting the significant role influencers play in shaping students' career awareness. However, the relatively lower score for "I often engage with content related to social media influencers" (Mean = 2.32, SD = 0.72) suggests passive consumption rather than active participation, implying that while influencers impact students' perceptions, they do not necessarily drive interactive engagement. The statement "I consider social media influencers as role models for field of study or career" (Mean = 2.51, SD = 0.86) reflects a moderate level of role-model identification, potentially influenced by the relatability and accessibility of influencers. Conversely, "I prefer to choose the same career as the social media influencers without having to continue my study" (Mean = 1.97, SD = 0.8) shows a cautious stance towards bypassing education, indicating that while influencers inspire career aspirations, students remain grounded in conventional educational paths. The mean score for "Social media influencers' effective career guidance encourages me to reflect on who I am and who I want to become" (Mean = 2.63, SD = 0.77) illustrates a reflective impact, highlighting influencers' role in students' identity exploration. The findings suggest that although social media influencers significantly shape perceptions of success and career possibilities, students retain a balanced perspective on the necessity of formal education, revealing a complex interplay between digital influence and traditional educational values.

Table 3

Social media influencers as role models and their impact on career aspirations

		Valid	N Missing	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
11.	I follow and often view my favourite social media influencers' career and activities.	439	0	2.71	0.81	1	4
12.	I often engage with content related to social media influencers.	439	0	2.32	0.72	1	4
13.	I have more than 1 social media influencers that I admire to.	439	0	2.72	0.85	1	4
14.	I consider social media influencers as role models for field of study or career.	439	0	2.51	0.86	1	4
15.	I admire social media influencers who are successful even without high education level.	439	0	3.2	0.76	1	4
16.	I prefer to choose the same career as the social media influencers without having to continue my study.	439	0	1.97	0.8	1	4
17.	I am interested in living the lifestyle/career promoted by social media influencers.	439	0	2.41	0.8	1	4
18.	Social media influencers effective career guidance encourages me to reflect on who I am and who I want to become.	439	0	2.63	0.77	1	4
19.	As inspired by the social media influencers, I prefer to work than continue my study.	439	0	2.06	0.9	1	4
20.	I believe I can be successful without tertiary education.	439	0	1.77	0.91		4

The analysis of mean scores and the heatmap illustrates a nuanced impact of social media influencers on the educational and career perceptions of Gombak's upper secondary students. The highest mean score for admiration towards influencers' success without high education levels (Mean = 3.2) highlights the growing acceptance of unconventional success narratives. However, the notably lower mean for believing in success without tertiary education (Mean = 1.77) reflects a persistent value placed on formal education, suggesting that students admire non-traditional achievements but remain cautious about forgoing academic qualifications. Moderate scores for following influencers' careers (Mean = 2.71) and considering them as role models (Mean = 2.51) indicate that while influencers inspire career awareness, they do not entirely shape career choices. The low engagement in choosing careers without further study (Mean = 1.97) underscores a prevailing inclination towards conventional educational pathways. The heatmap visually reinforces these trends, with warmer tones for admiration and cooler tones for bypassing education. Collectively, the findings reveal that social media influencers significantly influence students' perceptions of success and career possibilities, yet students maintain a balanced perspective by valuing educational attainment, demonstrating a complex interplay between digital influence and traditional educational aspirations.

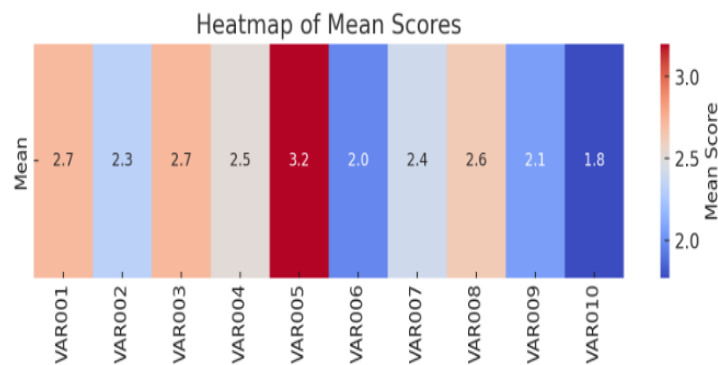


Fig. 2: Heatmap Table 3

4. Conclusions

This study reveals that social media influencers play a significant role in shaping the career aspirations and educational decision-making of upper secondary students in Gombak. While students are inspired by influencers and their non-traditional success stories, they maintain a critical approach to decision-making, often prioritizing conventional educational paths over influencer-promoted careers. The findings highlight the nuanced impact of digital media on student aspirations, suggesting that students engage with influencer content thoughtfully rather than blindly following it.

The study's unique contribution lies in its exploration of how influencer credibility, alignment with students' goals, and support from family or school interact to influence students' educational trajectories. It emphasizes the need for educational programs to incorporate media literacy and career guidance to help students critically assess online content. This is especially important in an age where digital influence plays an increasingly prominent role in shaping career decisions.

Given these insights, the study emphasizes the importance of incorporating media literacy programs in schools. Students' thoughtful engagement with influencer content shows that they are capable of critically assessing online information, yet they may still benefit from structured guidance on how to distinguish credible sources from biased or sponsored content. Providing students with tools to navigate the digital landscape will help them make more informed career decisions.

Additionally, career guidance programs should be tailored to address the tension between students' digital aspirations and traditional educational values. This study indicates that while influencers inspire curiosity about various career paths, students continue to prioritize familiar, traditional routes for career development. Career guidance programs should help students integrate the inspiration they gain from influencers with realistic career options, ensuring that they understand the full range of opportunities available to them.

By focusing on secondary school students in Malaysia, this research adds to the limited body of literature on the intersection of digital influence and career development in the context of non-Western, emerging economies. It provides valuable insights into how students in Gombak navigate the digital world and make decisions about their future paths.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of social media influencers on students' career readiness, particularly in terms of how these influences translate into real-world career choices. This study serves as a foundation for further investigation into the role of digital media in shaping the future workforce and highlights the importance of equipping students with the skills to navigate these influences effectively.

The tension between students' admiration for influencers and their preference for traditional education highlights a complex issue. While students are inspired by influencers' success, they still value formal education, likely due to cultural expectations and the security that traditional paths

offer. This shows the importance of teaching students how to balance digital influences with the value of education, helping them make informed decisions about their future careers.

5. Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

1. Self-Report Bias: As the study relied on self-reported data, students may have provided socially desirable responses, which could have influenced the accuracy of findings regarding their perceptions of influencers and career decisions.
2. Sample Restrictions: The study focused on students in Gombak, Malaysia, limiting the generalizability of the results to other regions or cultural contexts. The findings may not apply to students in different countries or educational systems.

These limitations may have shaped the results, and future research could address them by using more diverse samples and supplementary data collection methods.

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