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Childfree as a Lifestyle: Gen Z's Perspective in the Digital Space

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of digital technology has shifted socio-cultural conditions to become increasingly complex. One of the socio-cultural shifts that is happening is childfree. Gen z spends a lot of time on social media, they have a space to share views and experiences which influence their views on childfree decisions. This study examines how Generation Z constructs, conveys, and negotiates their views on the childfree lifestyle on social media. The approach in this study is a qualitative approach with a digital ethnography method. Data were collected through passive participant observation on the Instagram and TikTok platforms with the hashtag #childfree. The analysis was carried out with a feminist approach. The decision to childfree emerged from among Gen z in the digital space, not just a personal choice, it is a response to patriarchal dominance and at the same time reflects the critical awareness of young women regarding their rights to their own bodies and futures. Social media, Instagram and TikTok are important media in voicing and disseminating this issue, as well as forming solidarity between women.

Keywords: Feminism, gen z, childfree

Introduction

Socio-cultural shifts due to increasingly advanced civilization make people's lives increasingly complex. One form of socio-cultural shift that is currently popular and widespread among married couples is the decision not to have children or commonly called childfree. Childfree means a decision to live life without having children. Offspring can be interpreted as children born from the womb or adopted children. Not only taken by married couples but also someone who is not married decides to be childfree. This decision is taken consciously by the individual without any coercion from others.

Different from childless where childfree from the start has decided not to have children even though there are no economic and biological constraints. While childless is more directed at couples who cannot have children because of biological constraints (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008). In Indonesia, the childfree phenomenon gained public attention when a YouTuber, Gita Savitri Devi, openly announced her decision not to have children on social media, Instagram. Because she has many followers on Instagram social media, various pros and cons have emerged regarding her decision and made a number of Instagram celebrities also voice their opinions. The increasing discussion about this phenomenon has encouraged some people to consider the childfree decision as a life choice. Several top artists have also begun to voice their decisions to be childfree such as Cinta Laura, Chef Juna, and Deddy Corbuzier who said that if his partner does not want to have children, then he does not want to either (Amelia Sembiring & Muary, n.d.).

Childfree is not a unilateral decision, but an agreement between both parties, both from the male and female families. Some of the factors that drive childfree include; economic factors, mental unpreparedness to care for and raise children, high levels of busyness of husband and wife especially if both parties work, even social environmental factors (Amelia Sembiring & Muary, n.d.). In addition, reasons for past trauma such as bad memories as children and being more comfortable living without children also encourage the childfree phenomenon. Several studies state that economic constraints and current social structures, the demand for higher levels of education and concerns about work-family, encourage the decision to delay childbearing and accept not having children (Audinovic & Nugroho, 2023).

This phenomenon is also inseparable from the spotlight of religious values embraced by the majority of Indonesian society. Based on a religious perspective, especially Islam, having children is a gift and an obligation for a married couple. The majority of Indonesian people embrace Islam, which adheres to religious values and believes in cultural values that indicate that marriage is to form a family consisting of a father, mother, and children. This is reflected in one of the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad SAW which suggests that a good Muslim has many descendants. The decision to be childfree is seen as something that is not in line with the basic values in Islamic teachings. In addition, Christianity also confirms that marriage aims to have children and grandchildren to fill the earth and continue the lineage. In a cultured society, having children is the highest achievement in life. A child is seen as an object of continuation and can improve the condition of the family in the future, although this is tentative. Being a parent is a big responsibility, not just providing food and clothing (Amelia Sembiring & Muary, n.d.).

Based on data from the United States Census Bureau, in 2006, 26.2% of women aged 30-34 decided not to have children. That number increased in 2016 to 30.8%. This number supports the phenomenon of women or married couples choosing not to have children. This is because women, whether married

or not, choose to focus on their careers. In addition to the US, in several European countries, 14.4% of women aged 40-44 years but choose not to have children. This phenomenon has an impact on the decline in the national birth rate (Verniers, 2020).

Indonesia's population growth rate based on Population Census data in 2010 was 1.34% of the total of 2,404,377 men and 2,442,532 women. The population growth rate showed a decline in 2015, reaching 1.33%. Then, data from the Central Statistics Agency showed that the average population growth in the 2010-2020 range fell to 1.25%. Even in 2022, the figure decreased again to 1.17 percent. The birth rate in Indonesia has shown a decline since 2020. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the birth rate in Indonesia continues to decline every year. In 2020 the birth rate reached 4.69 million and in 2023 it became 4.62 million. The decline in population growth rates in various countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Europe is due to the decision not to have children or be childfree. Based on BPS data, in 2018 the number of marriages in Indonesia was 2,016,171 and decreased every year until in 2023 the number of marriages in Indonesia was 1,577,255. This increase illustrates social changes that support more individualistic and independent life choices, which also contribute to the childfree trend (Audinovic & Nugroho, 2023)

Generation Z or commonly called gen z is the population born in the period 1997-2012. The difference between this generation and the previous generation, gen z dares to break the traditional mindset which is interpreted into new values. This generation is also said to be more independent than the previous generation. They dare to make decisions without waiting for other people's opinions or even being told how to make decisions. Generation Z also faces pressure and expectations from their social environment, where the previous dominant social norm was to have children and build a family. However, their mindset and values have shifted, including in their views on the decision to have children. Researchers are of the view that gen z is a crucial subject in accepting or rejecting the childfree phenomenon because they are currently in the average age phase of reaching physical and mental maturity so that they are considered to be able to make decisions that can be accounted for (Fitriyani, 2018). At that age, it is the initial phase where teenagers are already thinking about their future lives and need to think wisely (Audinovic & Nugroho, 2023).

Gen z spends a lot of time on various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, Tiktok, and so on, which give them space to share their views, experiences and opinions about their lives. Social media content not only influences how they interact and view themselves, but also influences their views on childfree decisions (Isham et al., 2024). It can be concluded that the childfree phenomenon among Gen Z is not just a momentary trend, but rather part of the dynamics of complex social change, involving cultural, religious, economic, and lifestyle values that continue to develop. The presence of social media as a space for expression and discourse makes this issue increasingly relevant to study, especially to understand how Gen Z forms, voices, and responds to childfree lifestyle choices in the context of today's digital society.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with digital ethnography methods to examine how Generation Z constructs, conveys, and negotiates their views on the childfree lifestyle on social media. This method was chosen because social media is a space for social interaction that reflects the dynamics of culture, values, and identity of today's young generation.

Data were collected through passive participant observation on Instagram and TikTok platforms with the hashtag #childfree. Researchers documented posts, comments, and discussions that reflected Gen Z's views on the childfree lifestyle choice. The analysis was conducted using a feminist approach, to examine how social media becomes an arena of discourse, where traditional values about family and gender roles are challenged and negotiated by Gen Z, especially women.

Results and Discussion

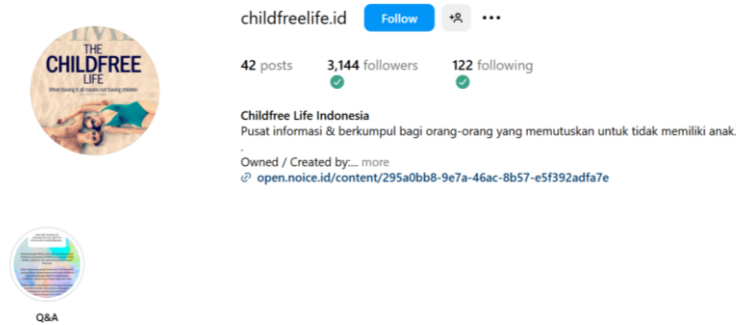
The advancement of information technology from year to year is increasingly rapid in its transformation to become more sophisticated, fast, and easily accessible. The internet has succeeded in breaking through borders between countries. Social media is one form of technological development that has a big influence. Social media users can easily create their own virtual world. Various platforms that are spread and freely downloaded have different features and functions that can provide information for users so that they can easily interact and express themselves in the virtual world. Likewise, the content of social media is increasingly varied and developing along with user preferences. The content can be news, entertainment, information, inspiration, and social interaction. The existence of this social media certainly has both positive and negative impacts. The positive impact of social media certainly has an effect on bringing about social change in society, while the negative impact is that Indonesian society is starting to lose values and norms. Some individuals or groups with a large number of social media followers are likely to take advantage of this to participate in certain activities. This certainly has an impact where people can interact without having to meet face to face but reduce interaction in the real world, so that society becomes more closed (Isham et al., 2024).

Generation Z has the character of spending free time to explore social media because they are tied to technology. This social media certainly has an influence in increasing insight, information, and relationships virtually. So that Gen Z easily finds out about this childfree issue through social media, especially Instagram.

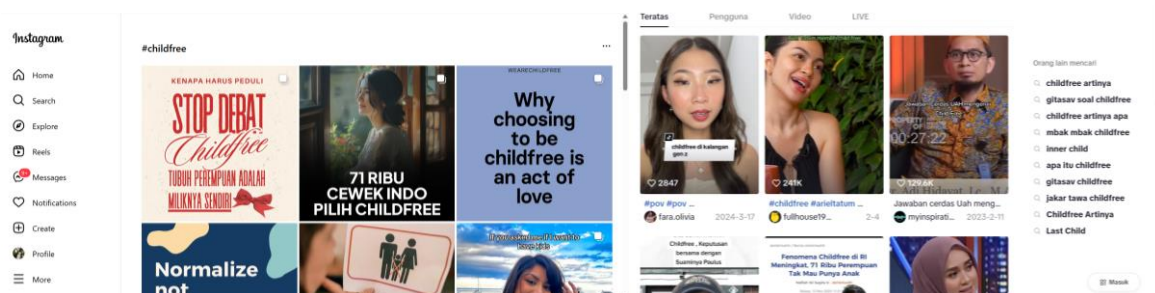
The issue of childfree in Indonesia itself began to be known when a YouTuber and Instagram celebrity, Gita Savitri Devi, voiced her opinion that she chose not to have children. She admitted that she and her partner were comfortable and happy with their current lives and had no intention of having children. On Instagram social media, Gita gave her opinion that having children is a big lifelong responsibility, very difficult and a burden in itself. Her opinion became controversial for Indonesian society who have the understanding that many children mean many blessings. This issue began to become

a topic of discussion, especially for Gen Z since influencers on social media dared to speak up, and they think that the decision not to have children is not a selfish decision. Society began to open their views on this issue which was considered unusual.

After Gita Savitri Devi, another influencer has voiced her opinion about childfree. Many agree with Gita and her partner's choice. One of them is Kei Savouire and his wife, they are influencers in the field of tips and tricks in building romantic relationships. Kei and his wife created an Instagram account with the name @childfree.id to show their support for this issue. The Instagram account voices the hearts of people who choose not to have children but the decision is not appreciated by either their family or those around them.



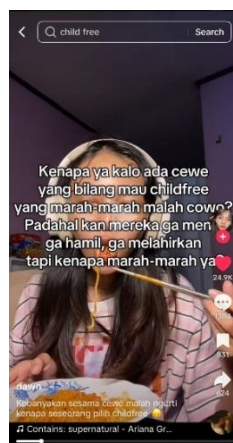
In addition to Instagram accounts, the issue of childfree is also widely discussed with the hashtag #childfree, both on Instagram and TikTok social media. On Instagram, there are 377 thousand posts discussing childfree, while on the TikTok application, there are 88,700 posts about the issue of childfree.



The majority of content created by Gen Z voices the decision not to have children as a form of control over their bodies and personal lives. Many videos and posts by social media users state that they are free to determine their future without being bound by traditional family norms.

One of the key findings of the study came from a TikTok post by a genz user who expressed her surprise at men's response to the childfree decision:

"Why is it that when a woman says she wants to be childfree, the one who gets angry is a man? They don't menstruate, don't get pregnant, don't give birth, but why do they get angry?" Then there was a comment that supported it: "Most fellow women understand why someone chooses to be childfree" (Tiktok diakses 17 Mei 2025).



The video has been liked by over 24,900 users, indicating a high level of public reaction with similar experiences or views from other users. The top comments on the video reinforce the sense of female solidarity:

"Most women understand why someone chooses to be childfree."

The comment indirectly voices the growing gender solidarity among Gen Z women. This sense of solidarity can be understood within the framework of multicultural feminism which sees the importance of women's personal and collective experiences as the basis for forming critical consciousness. In modern society, personal decisions such as not having children become part of ongoing self-reflection and not just a consequence of inherited social norms.

This upload shows that social media, especially TikTok, has become a new rubric space for Gen Z to convey criticism of social norms that are considered oppressive, including norms about reproduction and gender roles. Social media has proven to be a place for people to negotiate the meaning of life, family, and happiness. Instagram and TikTok social media are not only applications for seeking entertainment, but also a discussion space, redefining what is normal and abnormal in community life. Social media is not just a communication tool, but also a cultural space where meaning and identity are negotiated. The childfree decision represents a new lifestyle supported by the values of individualism, gender equality and freedom of choice.

The content shows how Gen Z responds to gender inequality in terms of reproduction. Men who reject childfree as a choice for women are seen as part of the patriarchy that wants to maintain control over women's bodies and roles. Based on the theory of radical feminism, women's bodies are considered as a place of conflict between individual freedom and patriarchal control. The content above shows radical feminism, where women's bodies are considered as a field of conflict between individual freedom and patriarchal control. Indirectly, the video raises the question "Why do men feel entitled to be angry at women's decisions that do not concern their bodies?" This shows the existence of a social structure that places men as the party that has authority over women's reproductive decisions, even though they do not feel the biological risk.

Basically, Gen Z dares to voice their opinions in public spaces, even through social media TikTok and Instagram. Digital space is an important medium for Gen Z to voice their identity and life choices. Childfree is not just an individual decision but also a form of resistance to gender norms and social expectations that oppress women. The negative reaction from men shows the dominance of masculinity that is disturbed by women's autonomous decisions regarding their bodies. Therefore, this study shows that social media is not only a mirror of public opinion, but also a tool of ideological struggle in reshaping views on gender, family, and identity

Conclusion

The decision to go childfree among Gen Z in the digital space is not just a personal choice, but reflects a form of defense against traditional gender structures that place women in domestic role structures. This reflects a shift in social values in modern society, where gender identities and roles are renegotiated in digital spaces. Feminism sociologically helps to understand that the choice of childfree is a response to patriarchal domination and at the same time reflects the critical awareness of young women towards their own body rights and future. Social media, Instagram and TikTok are important media in voicing and disseminating this issue, as well as forming solidarity between women.

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