The Existence of Indonesian Indie Bands in the Era of Generation Z: A Review and Challenges

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Abstract

This research aims to describes: 1) The indie music industry; 2) The existence of Indonesian indie bands in the era of generation Z; 3) The challenges and strategies of indie bands in facing the digital industry in the era of generation Z. The method used is descriptive qualitative with a phenomenological approach. Through the phenomenological approach, this research describes various conditions, situations, or phenomena of social reality that exist in society. The results showed that: 1) The indie music industry presents a different theme from musicians who are under a label. Indie musicians do not follow market trends, but indie musicians are more intense with fans through direct interaction through a more intimate community; 2) The existence of indie music groups in generation Z is strongly influenced by social media and digital music platform, instead of not following market trends, fans, in this case generation Z, make indie musicians a role model for their life style; 3) The main challenge for indie bands in the era of generation Z is that the characteristics of generation Z who always follow trends and fear of missing out are inversely proportional to the character of indie musicians who prioritize creativity and innovation rather than following market trends. A strategy that can be used is by utilizing social media and digital music platform. By utilizing social media and digital music platform, indie musicians have entered the world of generation Z and have the potential to promote their work in a wider realm.

Keywords: *Existence; Indie Bands; Generation Z*

Introduction

The music industry, which adapts to the younger generation market segment, influences the creativity of musicians to pay more attention to their development in terms of producing and distributing music independently. The term is better known as indie music. The term indie itself comes from the word independent which means independent, not bound by anything and any label. Musicians who are on the indie path show a passion for expressing idealism in their work without thinking about the standards of the dominant music industry, but still providing the best quality music. Artists also continue to present innovations in the musical works they present with the aim of attracting the attention of connoisseurs or listeners, (Wang, 2018). Indie is also known as *Do it Yourself*, it also explains that indie means having a very strong ideology from the word do it yourself or commonly known as D.I.Y. This ideology has an

important meaning for musicians who are on the indie path, because it describes the identity in working with the concept of do it yourself. From the indie ideology itself, musicians form a label that produces indie music.

The development of indie bands, especially in Indonesia, is quite rapid and tends to have a character in terms of music genre and appearance. The indie music genre emphasizes freedom of expression in a musical work represented through its songs. The freedom and character possessed by indie music, causes indie music to be difficult to accept and does not meet the standards of major music industry labels. It is considered not in accordance with consumer tastes in the market. But this situation is inversely proportional to the standards set by the official labels of the music industry, because in Indonesia there are many indie bands that are trending in the music tastes of young people today. According to Arian from Tigabelas Zine magazine (in Ayesha, 2016) the term indie band is a contextualization of bands that develop within the musician community, initiated by the actions of musicians to become independent in their work (without relying on material support from large companies). From this, indie bands do everything at their own expense, both in terms of music production, music distribution, and merchandise making.

Some indie bands that are currently trending among the younger generation are *Sore, Lomba Sihir, Rumah Sakit, Reality Club, The Panturas and Efek Rumah Kaca*. Spotify's digital platform has reached millions of monthly listeners. In addition to having a large number of monthly listeners, some of the band's songs also often occupy the top chart at the time of release until now. Each band has its own character of songs and music genres. Indie songs are categorized as songs that are easily accepted by listeners, and the lyrics in each song mostly represent the lives of young people in the generation Z era. Bands that are trending among generation Z are increasingly soaring, due to the dominance in various music performance events in Indonesia's big cities, such as Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta.

The idealism of indie music proves that they are also competitive with music in general that is popular and trend-oriented. Similar statements are also reinforced that indie music schemes are able to dominate part of the music market in Indonesia. This success shows that the previous indie culture that emerged as a form of resistance to domination has now undergone changes, (Pradnya, 2024). Some changes that adjust to the times occur as a form of maintaining the existence of indie bands. Existence can be defined as a condition or existence of an entity or object. Existence refers to the fact that something exists, both physically and conceptually. According to Khoiroh & Kusumastuti (2020) existence is a certain state that is more specific than something, which implies that everything that has existence is certainly real or exists, and what does not exist will not have existence. Existence is proven by humans having movements or changes in these conditions to show their existence. Another opinion is explained by Dagun (1990) that existence is shown through a series of activities or activities that have facts as a form of their existence. The implementation of Dagun's theory that occurs in this study is the existence of indie bands in Indonesia in the era of generation Z can be seen from the existence of activities, namely the effectiveness in working by launching a song or album at a certain time, as well as facts such as achievements or achievements achieved through nominations or awards, public appreciation of their work.

Generation Z or commonly referred to as centennials, is a generation born in 1997-2012. Generation Z developed with high digital mobility. Almost all circles of generation Z currently depend on mobile devices in carrying out all their activities, (Arum et al., 2023). Generation Z is commonly referred to as the internet generation, because they are exposed to the internet and social media at a relatively young age. They grew up in an era of rapid digital and internet technology, causing generation Z to have unique characteristics in consuming media, including various kinds of social media such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Generation Z prefers to watch or read news through social media that can be accessed anytime and anywhere. The ease of accessing social media makes this generation not want to be left behind in terms of life style, seen from the appearance or way of dressing, as well as music

tastes that always follow the trends of their role models obtained from social media. The relationship between Generation Z and the existence of indie music can be seen from how indie music, which is synonymous with a culture of freedom of expression, has succeeded in penetrating the lives of young people with the uniqueness raised by indie music through music genres or song lyrics that are different from other popular or mainstream music, as well as the fashion character or the way of dressing presented by each indie band member.

Several studies that have been conducted also contribute knowledge to conduct research on the existence of indie bands in the generation Z era. Research conducted by Fawaid (2021) with examining indie musicians as an alternative to music without labels and making the band "Silampukau" as an object. Silampukau as an indie band carries out the production process to the release of works independently. Theoretically, the Silampukau band has carried out the production process well, there are only differences in production support facilities independently with facilities provided by major labels. Research conducted by Ramadhanti et al (2019)) looked at the motivation for using Spotify as a medium for disseminating indie band works. The results of the study state that by disseminating works through music platforms such as Spotify, it provides positive things for the band's existence. Indie bands also get copyright for their work and get appreciation in the form of money. Research conducted by Roziq et al (2024) analyzing the views of gen Z towards live music in coffe shop. The results of the study explain that live music witnessed by most gen Z can provide experience, identity and sensation. The research data also states that some gen Z have a preference for indie music to provide a more supportive atmosphere in enjoying coffee.

From the phenomena that have been described, the problem formulations to be revealed in this study are: 1). What is the indie music industry?? 2). How is the existence of indie music groups in the Generation Z era? 3). What are the challenges and strategies of indie bands in facing the digital music industry in the era of generation Z? The reason the author chose the title "The Existence of Indie Bands in the Generation Z Era" is because of the high interest of the younger generation, especially among generation Z who are mastering the ecosystem for indie bands in Indonesia. The author also wants to know how the development of indie bands and their efforts to maintain their existence amidst the onslaught of other major label bands. This research was conducted to respond to the lack of studies on what is behind the existence of indie bands in the generation Z era.

Method

The type of method used in this research is descriptive qualitative with a phenomenological approach. According to Bungin (2007) qualitative research aims to describe, summarize, or describe various conditions, situations, or phenomena of social reality of the community that is the subject of research. This type of research seeks to draw reality as a characteristic, character, trait, model, sign, or description of certain conditions, situations, or phenomena. Phenomenology is a science that studies phenomena that distinguish something from others, or a discipline that explains and classifies phenomena. In other words, phenomenology studies the phenomena that are in front of our eyes and how they appear, (Kuswarno, 2008).

The phenomenological approach is used to explore human experience, both in thought and action, including the aesthetic assessment of the phenomenon. Through the phenomenological approach, research on the existence of indie bands in the era of generation Z will explain and provide deep insights into how indie music influences and shapes the experiences, identities and interpersonal relationships of this generation in a broader cultural context.

The purpose of this research is to describe the development and existence of indie bands in Indonesia, as well as efforts to maintain their existence among Generation Z. The research was conducted in stages with a data collection process in the form of tracing the sources of books, magazines,

articles from digital platforms, and journals relevant to the development and existence of indie bands in Indonesia in the era of generation Z.

Results and Discussion

1.Indie Music Industry

The indie music industry is a platform for musicians to express their creativity independently, away from regulations and control by major music labels. The pattern of this industry allows musicians to have artistic freedom in terms of creation and maintenance of works such as songwriting, making music, to the release stage. The diversity of music genres that exist in the indie music industry allows listeners to find the type of music that suits their references outside the mainstream. Although they don't always have the same access as major music labels, indie musicians can utilize social media and digital platforms such as Bandcamp, Spotify, YouTube, Joox, Apple Music, to reach their listeners from local to global. A strong community and support from fellow musicians and listeners is key to expanding indie music's influence. Although faced with challenges such as financial and popularity that are not as big as the official label musicians in general, the indie music industry continues to grow and provide space for musicians to express themselves authentically. The indie music industry also provides an opportunity to expand the local music landscape with innovation and diversity.

In Indonesia's modern music ecosystem, indie bands play an important role that has made a significant impact. Not only do they contribute to the diversity of music with creative and innovative approaches, but they also become a voice for relevant social and cultural issues in society. Indie bands often express their opinions on issues such as politics, social injustice, the environment, or human rights through song lyrics. One such indie band from Jakarta, *Lomba Sihir*, made a song titled "*Nirrlaba*". Expressed through excerpts from the lyrics of the song *Nirrlaba*, namely: *internet, ekonomi salah kami lagi. Istana, bencana salah kami lagi.Orang hilang, peluang salah kami lagi,* (Arifin, 2022). The song was created with the aim of expressing anger towards a government that is too neglectful and unfair to its people.

Not only from a compositional standpoint, being part of an indie band gives musicians the opportunity to maintain their artistic independence without being tied to a major record label contract, ultimately enriching the music industry with original and bold sounds. In various ways such as promoting the release of new songs, concerts, and participating in music festivals, indie bands in Indonesia are also helping to revive the local music industry. It is a way to promote the potential of local musicians and create opportunities for young artists to get involved in the music industry. Moreover, they are not only composers, but also a source of inspiration for the younger generation, especially generation Z who are currently dominating various music segments or markets. Inspiration is proven through proving that with determination and hard work, anyone can achieve success in the music world without having to rely on support from major labels. Thus, indie bands play an important role in shaping Indonesia's music perspective by making meaningful contributions in terms of creativity, innovation, and delivering important messages to society, especially the younger generation through the songs they create.

2.The Existence of Indie Bands in the Era of Generation Z

Indie bands have a significant opportunity to survive and thrive in the Generation Z environment. This is characterized by several unique characteristics that support the existence and growth of these bands. Generation Z, who have grown up with digital technology and extensive internet access, tend to have more diverse music preferences and a greater appreciation for the creativity of musicians. Social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which are close to the lives of Generation Z, allow musicians, especially indie bands, to reach the widest audience by utilizing platforms to release music,

promote concert events, and interact directly with their fans. The presence of social media also makes it possible to build a solid community from various domains, which is an important aspect to survive and thrive.

Digital platforms' algorithms and playlists also help music to be easily discovered by new listeners. Generation Z tends to value authenticity and diversity in music, they are more open to various genres and styles of music that are not mainstream. This can provide space for indie bands to create works that are unique and characterized, so that they are able to present something original and have a great opportunity to get great attention and support from an audience that mostly includes generation Z.

In accordance with the current market segmentation, namely generation Z who are very active on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, indie bands' steps to maintain their existence are marked by the use of digital media. Their songs can be accessed through digital media music platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Joox, YouTube Music. Here is one example of an indie band that posts its profile and work on the Spotify music platform:

Figure 1: Reality Club on platform Spotify
(source: https://open.spotify.com/intl-id)

Based on the description of the picture above, Reality Club is a band from the city of Jakarta with an indie-rock genre founded in 2016. Judging from the artist profile page on the Spotify platform, the band has approximately 2.3 million monthly listeners. Currently Reality club has 3 albums consisting of Never Get Better released in 2017, What Do You Really Know? in 2019, and Reality Club Presents in 2023, (Spotify Music, 2016). The band is one of the indie bands favored by generation Z when seen from the monthly listeners who reach fantastic numbers. Some works such as Anything You Want, which represents the life of young people and is packaged in English, is considered a classy band.

3. Challenges and Strategies Faced by Indie Bands to Face Digital Music in the Era of Generation Z

Generation Z is the generation born in 1997-2012. This generation emerged along with the rapid development of technology. The development of technology makes this generation facilitated and comfortable with the emergence of the internet. The internet makes it easy to access various information, including social media that is close to the lives of this generation. Social media provides a way to communicate online and share information both about themselves and other things. The journey about the development of generation Z in the explanation above, describes the behavioral trends, as well as habits at each time, where this generation is familiar with technology and makes social media a daily routine. Social media is used as a reference for self-actualization and getting the latest information that includes life style. These social media characteristics are inherent to generation Z.

Characteristics are traits or characteristics of a person's behavior that can improve quality of life, (Ratnasari et al., 2020). Each individual has their own characteristics that cannot be equated from one individual to another. Including the characteristics possessed by generation Z, which causes quite a contrast between this generation and the previous generations. Some characteristics of generation Z according to David & Stillman (2018) these include: (1) Figital, generation Z has never limited the activities and scope between the real world and the virtual world. The rapid development of technology makes it very easy for this generation to access and find various things available on applications and online sites. Including in the activity of accessing music applications where the aim is to explore and follow the music that is trending among them; (2) Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) or the fear of being left behind makes generation Z, known as the digital generation, able to collect information on the internet that is considered important and useful for them. Fear of missing out and curiosity make this generation anxious if they are not updated on the latest news. Not only news, in music taste this generation also wants to understand and take the essence of what others are following. This is what makes generation Z worry about being left behind by those around them, because it is considered an opportunity for them to increase their existence and competitiveness in music taste; (3) Driven by something. Generation Z is considered a realistic generation and does not have big dreams, but they strive to bring change or a positive impact on the environment with current technological developments. Trying to introduce personal branding on social media through the way they dress, respond to things, and taste in music that is not far from the influence of the environment in social media makes them feel superior and confident.

As discussed above, it can be concluded that the impact of technological development is one of the factors that can shape the characteristics of Generation Z. Some of their characteristics make this generation free to express themselves on social media, have a fear of being left behind by something new, as well as in terms of music. Their preferences in music are determined by what is currently trending. The ease of accessing music from various platforms makes Generation Z tend to have many different preferences from previous generations. Technology and social media play a big role in shaping Generation Z's music preferences. They grew up in an era where it was easy to explore music through streaming platforms such as Spotify and YouTube. These music platforms make it possible to discover and explore different types of music without any restrictions. According to IDN Research Institute (2024) several music platforms have emerged as favorite music apps across the board. The music platforms include Spotify, YouTube, Joox, and Apple Music. Among the streaming platform apps, the most widely used app is Spotify. The app is considered to have advantages and contains a variety of genres and the most popular musicians. Spotify's widespread popularity relates to the app's free and premium offerings, as well as catering to different user preferences. Here are the results of the percentage based on research IDN Research Institute, (2024) about digital music platform users in terms of the age limit of generation Z in Indonesia:
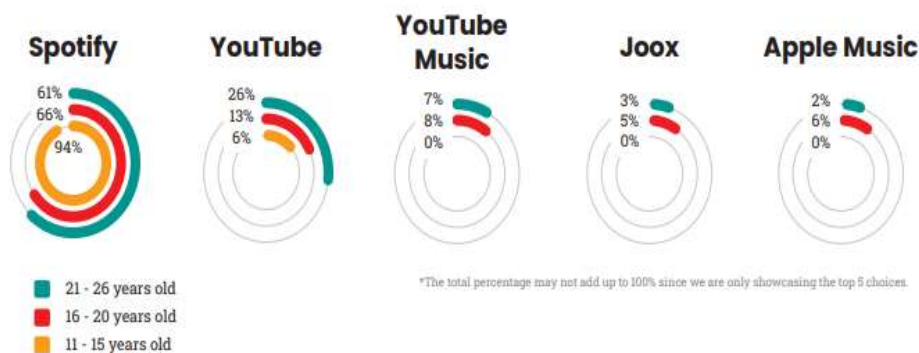

Figure 2: Presentation of Generation Z's use of music platforms in Indonesia
(Source: journal IDN Research Institute, 2024)

In accordance with the description of the picture above, the highest percentage of music listeners is shown on the Spotify digital platform. This music application has the highest percentage with a very varied age. The highest percentage of listeners is occupied by generation Z at the age of 11 to 15 years with a percentage of 94%. Furthermore, it is shown by a percentage of 66% at the age of 16 to 20 years and followed by the lowest order, namely listeners with ages ranging from 21 to 26 years with a percentage of 61%. It can be concluded that Spotify listeners are most in demand by teenagers to middle class. Apart from being easily accessible, this application always recommends listeners based on aglorithms. New songs and artists will appear based on the preferences listened to by users. The various features provided by some of the music platforms above have succeeded in attracting the interest and loyalty of generation Z as some of the leading music streaming platforms today.

The advantages of the Spotify music platform are utilized by a number of indie bands to promote and distribute their music. One example of a pioneering band in the indie music scene in Indonesia is Rumah Sakit. The band from Jakarta was founded in 1994. As the name "Rumah Sakit" implies, it is expected that the songs created can heal wounds from life stories, romance, and bring the perfect soundtrack of life to the listener. The utilization of the Spotify digital music platform is used as a medium for disseminating musical works by indie musicians. In accordance with the previous explanation, the Spotify application has the highest percentage and is massively used by generation Z. Various features and facilities can be easily accessed. Various features and facilities can be easily accessed, one of which is the number of monthly listeners and followers listed on each indie band's profile. The following image is an example of an indie band profile posted on the Spotify music platform:
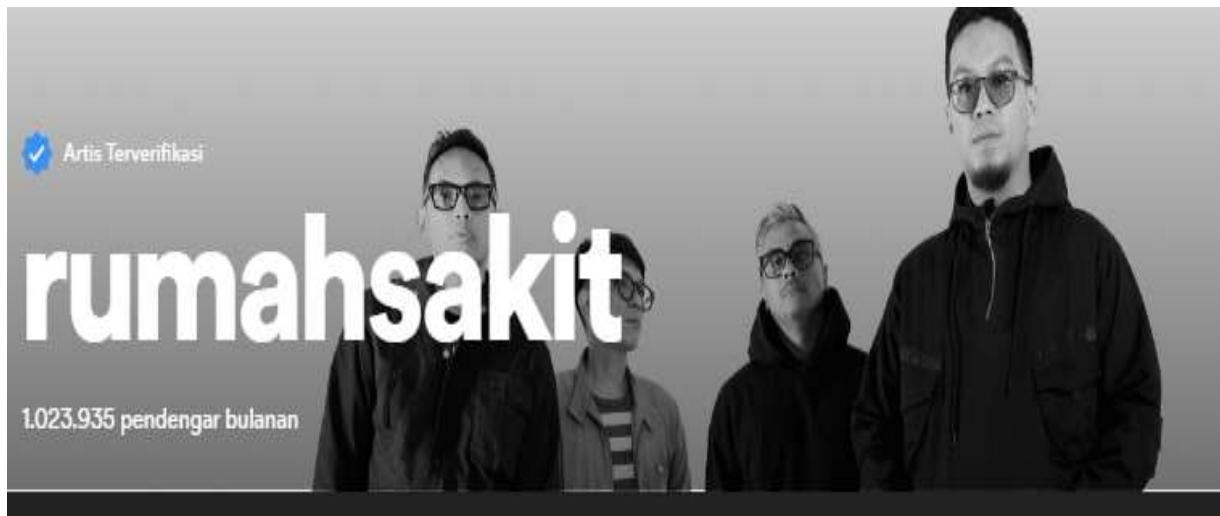

Figure 3: Profile view of the Rumah Sakit band on the Spotify platform.
(Source: https://open.spotify.com/intl-id)

Through the Spotify application profile view above, the image shows that the Rumah Sakit has a total of 1,023,935 monthly listeners. This motivates indie musicians to use the Spotify digital platform because it has the potential to have a wide audience and reach when their work is released. Spotify's digital music platform is considered very effective for promoting and maintaining existence amidst the onslaught of big label bands. This is similarly evidenced by research Andry & Tjee (2019) that Spotify is one of the most popular music streaming apps among young Indonesians. The majority of young people, especially students, are more likely to use Spotify premium services to listen to music because of the good audio quality, as well as the ability to download officially, in accordance with the copyright representation held by the Spotify platform.

Not only through music platforms as a system of distributing and promoting songs, music works also have a great possibility to be better known through social media such as Instagram, TikTok, because these applications can display trending song algorithms. The utilization of social media can be an opportunity for indie musicians to promote their work through interesting content with the aim of grabbing the attention of the audience, especially among generation Z. In addition to content from social media, indie band musicians can also interact directly with a wider range of fans. The freedom of access to social media and music platforms tends to be unlimited and will always be up to date. Thus, digital music platforms and social media not only influence the way Generation Z listens to music, but also as a medium for indie bands to maintain their existence. Both can reach the widest possible market.

The realm of social media and music platforms is currently being dominated by this generation, making musicians who are not funded by major labels or independent musicians maximize opportunities. But behind the strategy to maintain their existence, indie bands also face various challenges in terms of marketing and promotion in the digital era. Limited resources are a major obstacle because the majority of indie bands do not get support in the financial aspect like bands from major labels, which has an impact on promotion and marketing which requires a lot of money. The limited resources make it difficult for indie bands to follow marketing strategies such as digital advertising. They have their own way of utilizing social media with unpaid content and digital music platforms to promote music or works. Furthermore, there is competition among indie bands in trying to gain audience attention from the many other indie bands. In order to exist, they must have a strong character or characteristic to form an identity. The character can be built from the genre of music, appearance, and their actions in front of the stage.

In this time of competition, it is important for indie bands to capitalize on their uniqueness and authenticity, and utilize effective promotional strategies. The need for indie band strategies to build a fan base is a form of strengthening existence in the generation Z era. The form of strengthening existence is as follows:

a. Leveraging Social Media

Generation Z is characterized by the fear of being left behind and wanting to be up to date, making their lives not far from social media. Following trends with the aim of maintaining life style and following the type of music that is trending. In the midst of the onslaught of social media in the scope of generation Z, indie bands utilize social media to share creative content such as short videos as a sneak peek of the work to be released or what is commonly called a teaser video. The purpose of creating teaser video content is to attract the audience's curiosity and curiosity about the full work to be released.

In addition to teaser videos, behind-the-scenes content, also known as behind-the-scenes videos of an indie band's creative process, is one content that is quite popular with audiences. Judging from the band's YouTube page, the content has received enthusiasm and good comments from YouTube viewers. This is one way for them to document the creative process of a concert production, as well as a form of maintaining their existence and interacting with their fans through social media.

b. Collaboration with Musicians/Content Creators

Collaborating with content creators through social media such as Instagram, YouTube or TikTok helps indie bands expand their reach. Such collaborations can include songwriting, live session and concert videos, or other relevant content. This was done by indie band "Efek Rumah Kaca" who collaborated with a number of musicians in a concert titled "Rimpang".

Figure 4: Poster of the concert "Rimpang" Efek Rumah Kaca
(Source: Instagram @plainsonglive_ and @sebelahmata_erk)

As written in the poster above, Efek Rumah Kaca has announced that they are collaborating with a number of musicians to sing their songs on the album "Rimpang". One of those musicians and content creators is Sivia Azizah, a singer with a pop soul genre. The opportunity is also a new experience for the collaborators because they have the challenge of performing songs outside the usual music genre. The same thing was experienced by Efek Rumah Kaca, which provided an aesthetic experience for its audience and listeners through the concert, (Manuel, 2023).

c. Leveraging Digital Music Platforms

Music platforms are one of the spaces utilized by indie bands to distribute and promote their work. Various songs were created by raising topics relevant to generation Z from romance to life. Various songs from indie bands can be accessed and found easily on music streaming applications. Spotify is one of the digital music applications that has the most users and most of them are generation Z, (IDN Research Institute, 2024).

d. Interactive Content

Various ways are done by indie bands to maintain their existence, improve the quality of music from the band itself, and hope to get more attention from their audience or fans who are always enthusiastic about the new breakthroughs made, either live or online through social media. Through the creation of interactive content such as quizzes or what is known as giveaways, it can increase interaction with fans. Not only quiz content, but also polls or voting on band decisions, such as making playlists that will be performed during live performances or on merchandise design. It can help interact with fans through the creative process and build stronger engagement.

In building a fan base among Generation Z, many things are done by indie bands, including utilizing social media with consistent and interesting content and utilizing digital music platforms. Other ways to maintain their existence can also be done by collaborating with other musicians, and creating songs that are relevant to life is also one of the ways indie bands do to build a fan base, as well as maintain their existence in the midst of the many big musicians in Indonesia. It is hoped that with a consistent and creative approach in implementing various strategies, indie bands have a great opportunity to build a strong and sustainable relationship with generation Z.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion, the conclusions in this study are: First, the indie music industry is an independent expression of musicians' creativity that allows musicians to work freely without pressure and requests from outside parties. The indie music industry presents a different theme from musicians who are under a label. Without following market trends, indie musicians prioritize creativity and innovation in their work, which makes indie musicians raise issues such as social culture, political intrigue, social injustice, the environment and human rights. Indie musicians are not focused on following market trends, on the other hand indie musicians are more intense with fans with direct interaction through intimate gigs and indirectly through social media to communicate with fans in a more intimate community. Despite not having access to marketing like label musicians, indie musicians have a strong community and support from fans who feel they are represented by the work produced by indie musicians.

Second, the existence of indie bands in the generation Z era is also influenced by generation Z's activities in accessing social media platforms. Generation Z, which cannot be far from social media activities, allows indie musicians to maintain their existence through communication, promotion of works to concert promotions carried out on social media. The characteristics of generation Z in music tastes also provide an opportunity for indie bands to highlight unique works with character, so that generation Z provides its own space for the existence of indie music. The existence of indie music groups in generation Z is strongly influenced by social media, instead of not following market trends, fans, in this case generation Z, make indie musicians a role model for their life style.

Third, the music preferences of Generation Z are a challenge for indie musicians to maintain their existence. Generation Z, which tends to be more open and does not stick to one genre in the music they are interested in, makes the existence of indie musicians uncertain, because indie musicians usually only raise one genre for all songs created. Generation Z's characteristic of always following trends and fear of missing out is inversely proportional to the character of indie musicians who prioritize creativity and innovation rather than following market trends. Strategies that can be carried out by indie musicians to maintain their existence in generation Z can be done by utilizing social media and digital music platforms. By utilizing social media and digital music platforms, indie musicians have entered the world of generation Z and have the potential to promote their work in a wider realm. Indie musicians should be able to utilize both platforms to interact with generation Z, this can be done through authentic content, collaboration with other musicians and content creators who are influencers among generation Z. Speaking of existence, even indie musicians need to promote their work. In the current era of generation Z, the promotion of works is not meant to follow market trends, but rather to introduce works in a way that suits the existing era.

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