

The perspective of youth financial literacy, education, and profession on recruitment

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Abstract

Introduction/Main Objectives: This study examines the perspectives of human resource managers on young job candidates who possess financial literacy and engage in content creation as a side profession. The research aims to understand how these non-traditional qualifications influence recruitment decisions in the evolving digital economy, where youth are increasingly developing diverse skill sets beyond their formal education.

Background Problems: The emergence of young candidates with financial literacy and content creation experience presents a challenge to traditional recruitment paradigms that primarily value academic credentials and linear career paths. This study addresses the research problem of how HR managers evaluate and weigh these non-traditional qualifications against conventional criteria, particularly in the Indonesian context where digital literacy and financial awareness among youth have significantly improved in recent years.

Novelty: This research provides novel insights by specifically focusing on the recruiter's perspective regarding candidates with dual competencies - traditional education combined with financial literacy and digital content creation skills. The study breaks new ground by examining how these multifaceted qualifications are perceived in the recruitment process, offering valuable insights for both job seekers and educational institutions in adapting to changing market demands.

Research Methods: The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, conducting in-depth interviews with five participants comprising two HR managers from manufacturing and technology sectors and three job seekers with active content creation backgrounds in Malang. Data collection utilized semi-structured interviews and document analysis, with thematic analysis applied to identify key patterns and insights regarding recruitment perspectives and criteria.

Finding/Results: The findings reveal that HR managers perceive financial literacy as an indicator of analytical thinking and responsibility, while content creation experience demonstrates creativity and digital proficiency. However, these non-traditional qualifications remain supplementary to core job competencies. Technology sectors show greater appreciation for these skills compared to traditional industries, though concerns about divided attention and professional image persist among recruiters.

Conclusion: The study concludes that while financial literacy and content creation experience enhance youth employability, they serve as complementary assets rather than primary qualifications. Job seekers should strategically present these skills while maintaining strong core competencies. The research implications suggest the need for educational institutions to integrate financial literacy and digital skills development while helping students balance traditional and modern career preparation approaches.

Keywords: Financial Literacy; Content Creation; Recruitment; HR Perspective; Youth Employability



Introduction

The contemporary employment landscape is experiencing significant transformation, shaped by digitalization and evolving workforce demographics. In Indonesia, this shift is particularly visible among young people: recent data from the Ministry of Manpower (2024) indicates that approximately 58 % of young professionals aged 21-28 maintain side-professions while still seeking formal employment. This multi-role phenomenon signifies a departure from the traditional single-career path. The proliferation of digital platforms has further facilitated the growth of content creation as a viable career pathway, with the Indonesian Creative Economy Agency reporting a 52 % increase in registered content creators between 2021 and 2024.

This phenomenon presents both opportunities and challenges for human resource management. Traditional recruitment paradigms—which primarily emphasize academic credentials, single-career trajectories, and linear progression—are now being re-evaluated in light of candidates who bring diverse portfolios: for example, financial literacy, digital content creation expertise, and side-gigs. According to the Indonesian Financial Services Authority (OJK, 2024), financial literacy among Indonesian youth has improved steadily, rising from 32 % in 2020 to 47 % in 2024. The improvement in financial literacy introduces new dimensions for candidate assessment by HR professionals—beyond conventional markers of qualification.

Existing literature reveals substantial gaps in understanding how these evolving qualifications impact recruitment decisions. Many studies have examined conventional recruitment criteria (e.g., academic qualifications, relevant work experience, job-specific skills) (e.g., Chen & Patel, 2023; Williams, 2024), but there is limited research into how HR managers perceive, evaluate, and assign value to non-traditional qualifications such as financial literacy and content creation experience. This gap is especially relevant in the Indonesian context, where the digital economy is expanding rapidly and young workers are increasingly engaging in multiple professional roles simultaneously.

This research aims to address this void by investigating HR managers' perspectives on candidates with financial literacy and content creation backgrounds. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how these non-traditional qualifications influence hiring decisions and candidate evaluation in today's competitive job market. By focusing on the recruiter's viewpoint, the study provides valuable insights into the evolving recruitment landscape in Indonesia's digital economy.

From a theoretical perspective, the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973) provide relevant lenses. Human Capital Theory posits that individuals invest in education, skills, and knowledge which increase their productivity and therefore their value to employers. Signalling Theory suggests that certain attributes (educational credentials, certificates, portfolios) serve as signals to employers regarding the candidate's underlying productivity and suitability for a role. In the current context, financial literacy and content-creation portfolios may function both as human capital investments and as signals to HR practitioners about a candidate's broader capabilities (digital literacy, entrepreneurial mindset, self-management).

In recent years, the concept of employability skills has broadened. A semi-systematic review found that employability in the 21st-century workplace requires not only technical skills but also digital literacy, communication, creativity, and adaptability. Moreover, research on digital skills confirms that digital content creation skills—defined as the ability to produce creative multimedia content and apply digital tools—positively correlate with employability among youth. These findings support the argument that candidates with side-hustles such as content creation might bring valuable capabilities beyond traditional credentials.

At the same time, financial literacy has been shown to influence individual decision-making, human capital development, and organisational performance in contexts such as SMEs. For example, Rehman & Mia (2024) conducted a systematic review of the determinants of financial literacy, pointing to education, experience, and socio-economic status as key factors. Similarly, initiatives linking financial literacy to human resource performance emphasise that employees' financial knowledge and behaviours influence productivity and organisational well-being.

Indonesia's youth labor market is being reshaped by the growth of the digital economy, social media platforms, and the gig ecosystem. Research has shown that digital skills, including content creation and data literacy, directly influence employability outcomes (Kim et al., 2023). The creative economy now accounts for a significant share of national GDP, with youth participation rising annually. These trends align with global observations: digital employability has become an essential component of youth competitiveness in modern recruitment (Zhang & Choi, 2022).

In recruitment contexts, HR professionals increasingly rely on digital tools and social media analytics for talent acquisition (Nikolaou, 2021). Employer branding and online presence significantly influence both job-seekers' intentions and recruiters' evaluations. In an Indonesian study, Firmansyah et al. (2024) found that millennials' job preferences are shaped by digital employer branding, CSR reputation, and perceived organizational innovativeness. This shift implies that candidates who demonstrate digital engagement—such as managing online content or personal brands—may signal greater alignment with contemporary corporate cultures.

Despite these developments, empirical research remains scarce on how HR managers perceive candidates with side professions or digital content portfolios. Questions persist about whether recruiters regard such experiences as assets (indicative of creativity and self-direction) or liabilities (suggesting distraction or lack of focus). This study therefore investigates HR managers' perspectives on youth candidates with high financial literacy and content creation experience, aiming to understand how these non-traditional qualifications affect recruitment decisions and evaluation criteria.

Research Methods

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore how human resource (HR) managers and young job seekers experience and interpret recruitment in the context of emerging non-traditional qualifications—specifically financial literacy and content creation backgrounds. The phenomenological design was chosen because it allows the researcher to capture the essence of lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018), particularly regarding perceptions, values, and meanings attached to recruitment processes in a digital economy setting.

The study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that social reality is constructed through individual experiences and interactions. This perspective aligns with the study's objective of understanding how recruiters and applicants *perceive* qualifications that deviate from traditional academic credentials. The approach emphasizes depth over breadth, enabling an in-depth understanding of subjective perceptions and organizational practices.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that participants possessed rich and relevant experiences related to recruitment and employability in the digital era. Five participants were recruited in total, representing diverse yet complementary perspectives:

- Two HR managers (from manufacturing and technology firms) with a minimum of eight years of recruitment experience, representing formal-sector hiring perspectives.

- Three young job seekers aged 22–26, all of whom maintained active content creation profiles (on YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram) while pursuing formal employment opportunities.

All participants were based in Malang, East Java, a city that represents Indonesia's growing creative and digital economy hub. The small but focused sample aligns with phenomenological research conventions (Smith & Nizza, 2021), prioritizing depth of understanding rather than representativeness.

Data collection was conducted between April and May 2024 using semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting 60–90 minutes each. Interviews were guided by open-ended questions focusing on participants' perceptions of financial literacy, education, and professional background in recruitment decisions. In addition to interviews, document analysis was performed on corporate recruitment policies, job advertisements, and participants' professional social media profiles to provide contextual understanding (Bowen, 2009). Field notes were also taken during observational sessions to capture non-verbal cues and contextual nuances. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase framework, encompassing familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Manual coding was utilized to ensure close engagement with the data, with iterative reading to identify emerging patterns. A cross-participant comparison was applied to contrast HR managers' perspectives with job seekers' experiences, enriching the interpretation.

To ensure rigor and credibility, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was also achieved through the integration of interview data, document analysis, and observational notes (Patton, 2020).

The conceptual framework guiding this study integrates theories from Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973), and Competency-Based Recruitment (Campion et al., 2011). Human Capital Theory suggests that individuals' knowledge and skills—including financial literacy and digital competencies—enhance their employability and perceived value to employers. Signaling Theory posits that candidates' non-traditional achievements (e.g., content creation portfolios) serve as credible signals of creativity, adaptability, and digital fluency in labor markets characterized by uncertainty (Connelly et al., 2011).

These frameworks jointly inform the study's analytical lens by linking youth financial literacy and digital professionalism to recruitment perceptions and decision-making in Indonesia's digital economy. The framework posits that HR managers interpret financial literacy and content creation not merely as auxiliary skills but as indicators of self-management, innovation, and financial responsibility, which influence perceived candidate quality and organizational fit.

Result

The study explored how HR managers and young job seekers perceive financial literacy and content creation experience within recruitment contexts. Through thematic analysis, three key themes emerged: HR managers' evaluation criteria, perceived advantages of non-traditional qualifications, and recruitment concerns regarding digital identity and work focus. These themes highlight the nuanced balance between valuing innovation and maintaining professional reliability in Indonesia's evolving labor market. The demographic background of the informant can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Informant

Role	Pseudonym	Age	Industry/Background	Key Characteristics
HR Manager	Bu Ani	42	Manufacturing	12 years HR experience
HR Manager	Pak Budi	39	Technology	10 years recruitment
Job Seeker	Ahmad	24	Engineering + YouTuber	15K subscribers, 2 years
Job Seeker	Sari	25	Economics + TikTok	50K followers, 3 years
Job Seeker	Rina	23	Communication + Instagram	20K followers, 2 years

HR Managers' Evaluation Criteria

Both HR managers—Bu Ani from the manufacturing sector and Pak Budi from the technology industry—emphasized that while traditional competencies remain central in candidate assessment, new forms of qualifications are gradually shaping recruitment judgments. Financial literacy was perceived as an indicator of analytical thinking, strategic foresight, and long-term planning capability, traits considered valuable in organizational decision-making.

Meanwhile, content creation experience was increasingly recognized as a proxy for digital literacy and creativity, especially in roles involving marketing, communication, and brand representation. However, both HR managers noted that these qualities must be balanced with the candidate's ability to manage multiple responsibilities effectively. Bu Ani highlighted that candidates with strong online engagement often demonstrate adaptability and self-learning capacity—attributes consistent with modern talent requirements—yet she maintained that “core technical competence still determines the final hiring decision.”

Perceived Advantages of Non-Traditional Qualifications

From the job seekers' side, participants such as Ahmad (engineering graduate and YouTuber with 15K subscribers), Sari (economics graduate and TikTok content creator with 50K followers), and Rina (communication graduate and Instagram influencer with 20K followers) expressed confidence that their digital engagement enhances employability. Their experience in managing content, audiences, and personal branding cultivated transferable skills—ranging from communication and marketing to project management.

HR managers also acknowledged these advantages, viewing digital skills and financial awareness as valuable signals of maturity, responsibility, and initiative. Sari, for instance, mentioned that her understanding of financial management from online entrepreneurship helped her make “smarter professional decisions,” which was positively viewed by recruiters. Similarly, content creation was regarded as evidence of entrepreneurial spirit and self-motivation, aligning with companies' increasing demand for innovative, proactive employees.

Recruitment Concerns and Professional Boundaries

Despite recognizing the benefits, both recruiters expressed reservations regarding potential divided attention between formal employment and content creation. HR professionals noted the risk that active content creators might struggle to maintain focus or commitment to their main job. Pak Budi highlighted that “digital presence can be a double-edged sword—it shows initiative, but it can also raise concerns about priorities.”

Additionally, concerns emerged regarding the relevance of content creation to specific job roles and the professional image reflected through social media. Some recruiters were cautious about candidates whose online personas might not align with corporate ethics or image standards. These concerns underscore the ongoing negotiation between embracing digital-era skills and maintaining organizational professionalism.

Discussion

The findings reveal a significant evolution in recruitment perspectives while maintaining traditional foundations. HR managers acknowledge the value of financial literacy and content creation skills but approach them as complementary rather than primary qualifications. This aligns with global trends identified by Thompson (2024), who emphasized that digital competencies are becoming essential components of employability, yet conventional technical skills and formal education remain dominant evaluation criteria. The cautious stance observed among HR professionals in manufacturing and technology sectors also reflects Garcia's (2023) argument that the valuation of digital experience is highly context-dependent, varying across industries and job roles.

From the perspective of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), the study supports the notion that financial literacy and content creation contribute to the accumulation of non-traditional human capital that enhances employability. Participants who demonstrated financial awareness and digital fluency were perceived as better equipped to handle complex, rapidly changing work environments—particularly those requiring strategic decision-making and adaptability. This corresponds with recent research by Kim and Park (2022), which found that financial literacy fosters analytical thinking and long-term planning among young professionals, attributes increasingly valued in modern organizations.

At the same time, the findings also reflect Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011), in which job seekers use observable signals—such as online content portfolios—to convey otherwise unobservable qualities like creativity, initiative, and digital literacy. The recruiters' responses indicate that these signals are effective in enhancing candidate visibility but are still evaluated against the backdrop of traditional indicators such as educational attainment and work experience. Similar dynamics were observed in studies by Zhang et al. (2023) and Albrecht and Collins (2021), where employers in digital industries interpreted online engagement as an indicator of self-directed learning and innovative capability.

However, this study also exposes the dual nature of digital engagement in recruitment contexts. While HR managers appreciate candidates' ability to manage online platforms and build audiences, they express concern over the potential for divided attention between content creation and formal employment. This ambivalence reflects findings by Duarte et al. (2022), who noted that employees' side ventures may enhance skill diversity but also raise concerns about loyalty and focus. The phenomenon also connects with boundary theory (Clark, 2000), suggesting that individuals who engage in multiple professional roles must effectively manage work-life segmentation to maintain credibility in both domains.

The industry-based divergence identified in this study further underscores the importance of contextual recruitment frameworks. Technology-oriented recruiters tend to value content creation as evidence of innovation and digital agility, consistent with findings from Li and Wang (2023), who reported that technology firms increasingly integrate social media analytics into candidate evaluation. In contrast, HR managers in more traditional sectors such as manufacturing remain conservative, prioritizing technical proficiency and organizational stability. This mirrors cross-industry trends reported by Anderson and Cappelli (2021), indicating that digital competence is an asset primarily when directly aligned with job functions.

Moreover, the recognition of financial literacy as a desirable attribute represents a shift toward holistic candidate evaluation. Rather than viewing financial skills as purely personal, recruiters now associate them with organizational value creation, risk awareness, and ethical decision-making. These perceptions resonate with global discussions on financial education's role in

fostering responsible workplace behavior (OECD, 2023; Nugroho & Setiawan, 2024). This integration of financial awareness into employability criteria highlights the evolving definition of professional competence in Indonesia's digital economy—moving from skill-based assessment toward character-based evaluation.

Methodologically, the phenomenological approach provided rich, experiential insights into how recruiters and job seekers navigate the changing employment landscape. By capturing subjective meanings, the study extends beyond quantitative generalizations to reveal how digital professionalism is interpreted in practice (Vagle, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). The thematic patterns identified—particularly regarding analytical thinking, creativity, and digital identity—demonstrate the coexistence of optimism and caution that typifies recruitment in transitional economies like Indonesia's.

In summary, the findings reaffirm that recruitment practices are undergoing a hybrid transformation, where digital-era competencies coexist with classical human capital benchmarks. Financial literacy and content creation experience act as supplementary employability signals that enhance a candidate's distinctiveness but do not yet replace traditional qualifications. The study contributes to existing literature by contextualizing this evolution within Indonesia's emerging digital economy, highlighting how HR professionals reinterpret employability standards amidst technological disruption and shifting generational expectations.

Conclusion

This study explored how financial literacy, educational background, and professional experiences—particularly content creation—shape recruitment perceptions among HR managers and young job seekers in Indonesia's dynamic labor market. The findings indicate that while traditional qualifications such as academic credentials and technical expertise remain central to hiring decisions, new forms of competencies are beginning to influence recruiter evaluations. Financial literacy is perceived as a marker of analytical capacity, long-term planning, and responsibility, whereas content creation experience reflects digital literacy, creativity, and entrepreneurial initiative.

Nevertheless, these non-traditional qualifications are still viewed as complementary rather than primary factors in recruitment. HR managers tend to appreciate digital and financial competencies when they align with job requirements, particularly in technology-related or communication-intensive roles. In contrast, more traditional sectors such as manufacturing remain cautious, emphasizing stability and technical proficiency. The dual perception of digital engagement—as both a strength and a potential distraction—illustrates the complex process through which organizations are redefining employability in the digital economy.

Overall, this study underscores a transitional phase in Indonesia's recruitment landscape. The growing recognition of financial literacy and digital creativity signals a shift toward more holistic assessments of candidate potential, blending classical and modern indicators of human capital. As industries continue to digitalize, recruiters and job seekers alike must adapt to a broader understanding of professionalism—one that values both cognitive skills and digital fluency as integral components of employability in the 21st-century workforce.

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