The Era of Gen Z and Social Media Stardom –The Impact on Higher Education in 2030

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Survey Research & Data Collection
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Abstract:
Over the years, the interest in seeking higher education have evolved – for both traditional and non-traditional learners. With each generation, we learn about the trends, beliefs, and goals for the future What sparks the interest for one generation may not create interest in others. Thus, it has been observed that younger generations Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012 and at the time of this writing, they are between the ages of 10 and 25), lean more toward an interest in achieving social media stardom as a career versus perusing or even valuing the need for higher education. The perceived idea that social media stardom generates higher revenues versus the creating debt in pursuing higher education, which often generates moderate incomes, has been developed within this generation. Thus, the impetus behind this research was to learn more about the future higher education goals of Generation Z. Surveys were distributed worldwide that lent to the researcher to better understand some of the factors that may contribute to Generation Z pursuing higher education. Additionally, assumptions, conclusions, and opportunities for future research predictions were learned.

Index Terms— generation z (gen z), higher education, social media stardom

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher Education has surely evolved over the years. From the impetus to explore higher education in pursuit of attaining career success (most often associated with higher salaries & social status) to the perception that higher education is supplementary or even not necessary in achieving success, recognition, and high incomes has transpired over the years. The idea that learning from videos, creating video content, and becoming a social media star drove the idea for this research. The researcher focused on Gen Z as they are the generation behind the millennials. Thus, this generation has different behavioral patterns, and they are also the next generation to continue or are currently at the age of continuing to higher education. There is limited research lending to the understanding the goals of Generation Z. Although we know that their habits, behaviors, and use of social media usage when seeking information exists, we cannot fully assess and draw conclusions on how this will impact the future of higher education. Thus, this research intends to collect primary research by surveying Generation Z to understand the goals of this generation as well as the impact more accurately on higher education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned previously, there is limited information on Generation Z and their interest or lack thereof in their pursuit of higher education. Some authors have suggested, for example, Ellis (2019) that becoming a social media start is the fourth most popular career aspiration for Gen Z. This research, however, has limitations, as it does not uncover how this information was derived. Additionally, the research provides that colleges are, in fact, using influencers on campus or even obtaining a stipend to help increase enrollment in many colleges. Several questions regarding Gen Z and how and if they will value higher education now and, in the future, remains unanswered. A closer look to the literature on Gen Z reveals several gaps and shortcomings. What do we really know about this generation when it comes to achieving academic excellence? Will colleges and universities alike need influencers to increase enrollment now and in the future? This is what the study by Ellis (2019) suggests.

Furthermore, Jha (2022), reports that YouTube contributed to India’s economy by creating 683,000 “full-time equivalent” jobs in 2020. Parker and Igielnik (2020), found that Gen Z is more ethnically diverse than other generations, and they are on their way to being the most well-educated generation to date. It was reported in the literature that among 18–21-year-olds in 2018, “57% were enrolled in a two or four-year college” faring slightly higher than millennials (Parker and Igielnik, 2020).

However, the gap in this literature still exists in that becoming “well-educated” may come from many venues, and this study falls short of defining this point. These two data points leave a gap in understanding of the future of Gen Z in pursuing higher education. In fact, if we interpret, we may also find controversy in predicting the future of this generation – Social Media Stardom or Higher Education.

Overall, there are key questions and notions that are still not discussed in the literature. To fill this literature gap, this research aims to identify the current and future of Gen Z and the pursuit of Higher Education in 2030. A still unresolved question is whether Gen Z will pursue higher education in 2030. As the author noted earlier, there is still a need for further research to better understand the mindset of Gen Z and what influences their educational decisions. A new approach is needed to uncover the background and mindset of Gen Z.

III. METHODOLOGY

Survey data was collected from 265 people who fell into the Gen Z category. The surveys were distributed worldwide, and the data collectors were included the researcher and graduate students at New York University. Below is the summary of the research and findings:

Summary of Survey Results & Findings (Please see full survey data in the Appendix)

- → Surveys (n = 265) were distributed by the researcher and research analysts.
- → All surveys were anonymous and did not include any identifying information.
- → We can conclude that only 7% of survey participants did not fall within the Gen Z.
- → Most of the survey participants fell between the ages of 20-24 (69%).

→ At the initiation of the survey, there was an equal distribution of males and females. At the end the survey, we found that most respondents were females (67%) and males (31%).

→ Most of the surveys distributed were within the United States, India, and China. Due to an issue with viewing the survey in English, the researchers translated the survey to Mandarin.

→ The data was then merged to summarize the findings.

→ Total Survey Respondents: n = 265
4 respondents identified themselves as North African
1 respondent identified themselves as South African
170 respondents identified themselves as North Asian
6 respondents identified themselves as Middle Eastern
34 respondents identified themselves as Southeast Asian
3 respondents identified themselves as Central American
46 respondents identified themselves as North American
1 respondent identified themselves as Australian
4 respondents identified themselves as New Zealand
12 respondents identified themselves as Western European

→ Most of the survey participants were already in college (83%). We may interpret this data to assume that those responding to the survey already thought that pursuing higher education was important. Thus, they were more inclined to having a formal graduate level education. In future questions, we will learn more about the participants career goals.

→ Interestingly, the highest level of education achieved by the participants' parents were primarily one of the following:
High School Diploma: 26%
Bachelor's Degree: 27%
M.B.A. or other master's degree: 25%

→ From this data, we can learn that regardless of educational level, achieving higher education was instilled in the respondents.

→ Not surprising was that most respondents are active on social media (95%).

→ We learned that most survey respondents are primarily from the English survey was Instagram (34%) but in the Mandarin survey, the most visited social media platform was Tiktok (36%).

→ To further explain and to make better sense of this disparity, Instagram is banned in China, and Tiktok is banned in India. Facebook is also banned in China.

→ Considering that our research analysts are within the GenZ category, assumptions can be made that most content sharing are photos and videos.

→ Most of the respondents' desire to pursue a professional career (31%) overall, then General Business (23%).

→ Interestingly, we found that only 13% of the respondents were currently social media creators. Based on Question 7, we learned that 95% of the respondents were active, at least 5 hours per week on social media, but not necessarily involved or even interested in content creation.

→ Overall, 75% of the respondents do not think that earning money as an influencer can replace the need for higher education. This corresponds to Question 10, where we learned that 31% of the respondents want to pursue a professional career.

→ Further supporting what we have learned thus far, 93% of the respondents think that higher education is needed to build a strong mindset for their future.

→ If a career as an influencer were to be pursued, the top 3 categories are as follows:
Daily Life Vlog 14%
Educational 12%
Make-up & Beauty 7%

→ We must first consider that most of the respondents were between the ages of 20-24 (Question 2). Thus, for this question, it supports that 49% responded that they would like to be in a professional career in 5 years.

→ Money was viewed 37% - “The more the better”; however, we can interpret from previous survey questions that making a lot of money is not necessarily thought to be achieved by becoming an influencer. on social media.

→ Overall, 37% responded that Happiness defines success. Thus, this may mean that money (Q. 16 that showed that money was of great importance) creates happiness.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the survey participants and findings, we can predict that the pursuit of higher education is still on the horizon for Gen Z. A worldwide representation offered us insight into this generation and their familial backgrounds and current mindset. Another promising future area of research would be to target Gen Z who is not currently in college (Ex. Ages 17-19; and 20-24). Additionally, further research may explore a more specific regional view on higher education based on cultural values and upbringing. Lastly, expanding the global segments (areas of the world) to include more diversity in responses and to strengthen the results of the data.

REFERENCES

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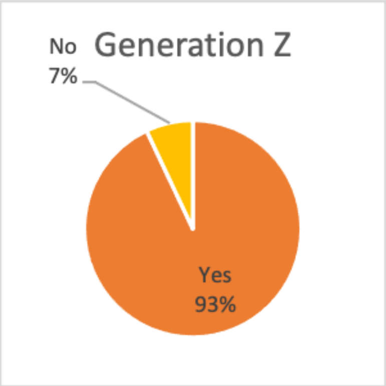
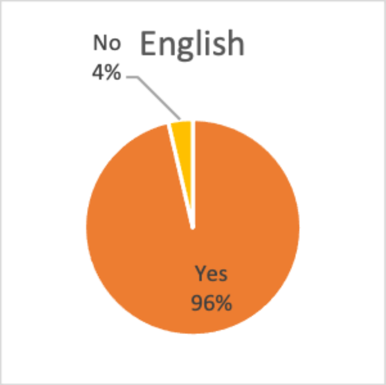
APPENDIX – SURVEY QUESTIONS AND DATA COLLECTION

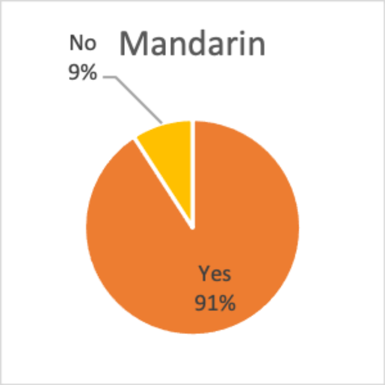
1.Were you born in 1997 – 2012?

Generation Z	English	Mandarin	Total
Yes	106	159	265
No	4	16	20
Grand Total	110	175	285

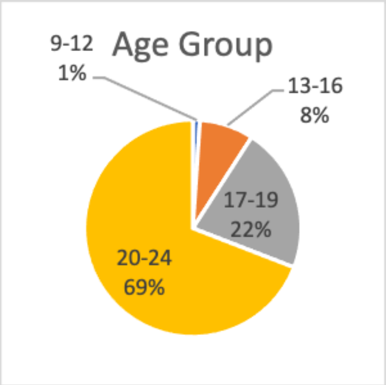


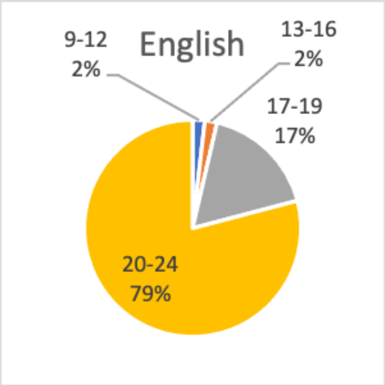
Age Group	English	Mandarin	Total
9-12	2	1	3
13-16	2	21	23
17-19	19	43	62
20-24	87	110	197
Grand Total	110	175	285

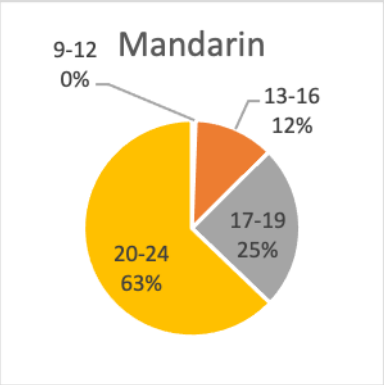




2.What is your age group?

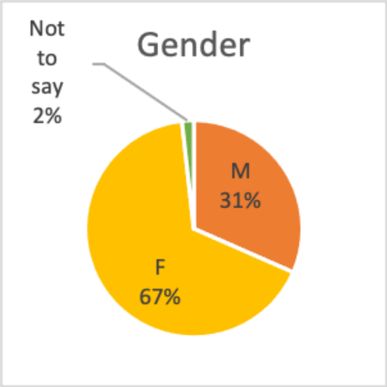


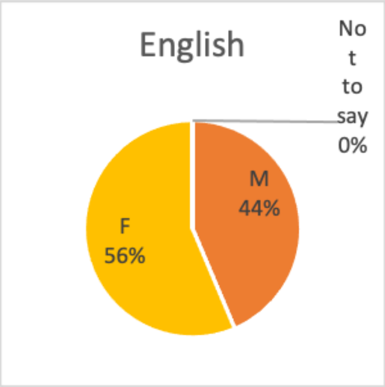


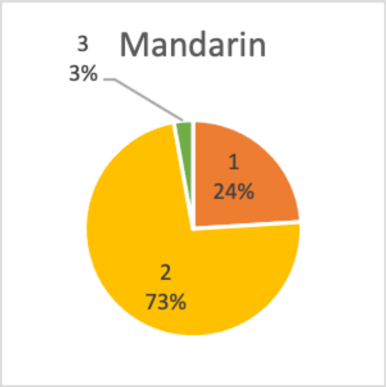


3.What is your gender?

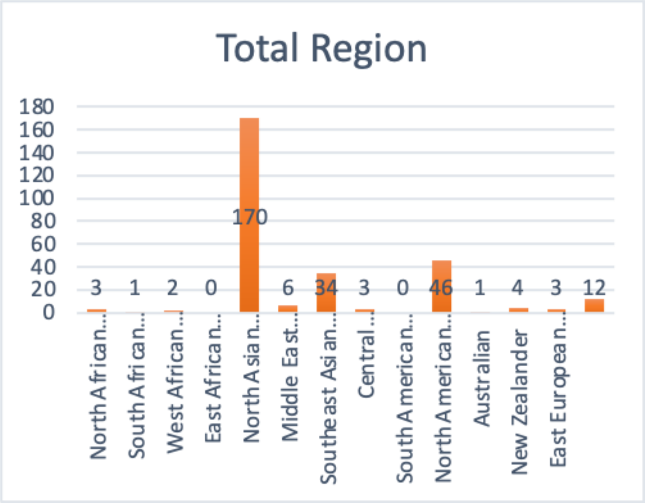
Gender	English	Mandarin	Total
M	48	42	90
F	62	128	190
Not to say	0	5	5
Grand Total	110	175	285

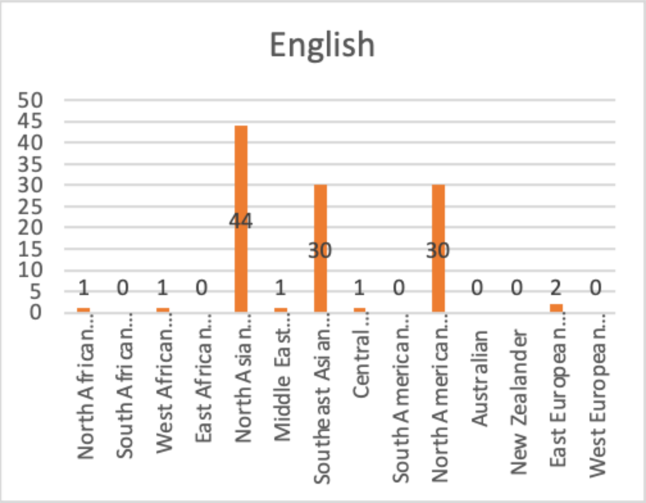


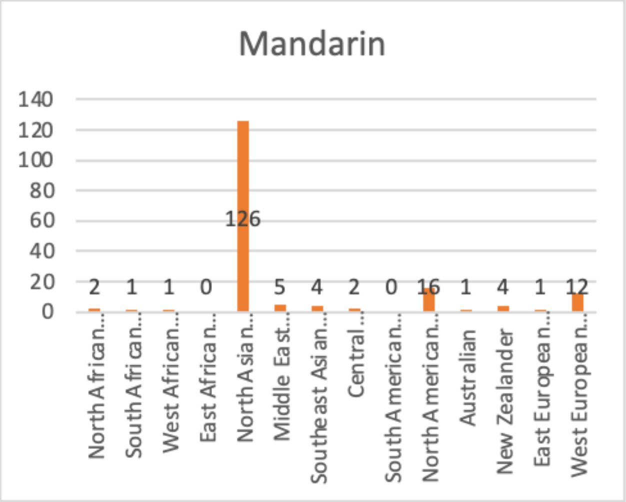




4.What region of the world do you most closely identify yourself?

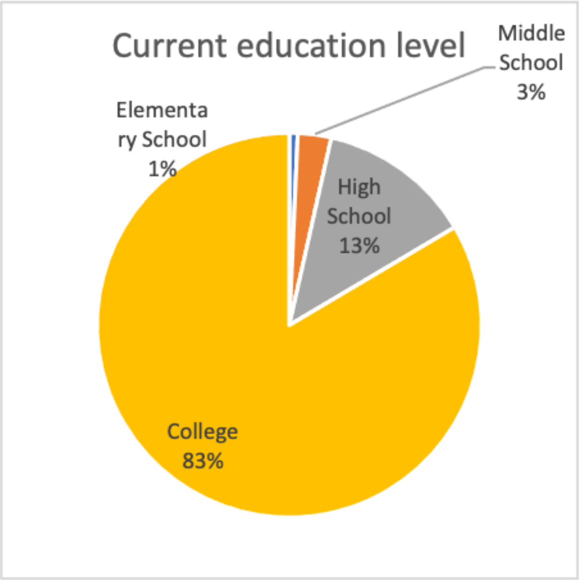


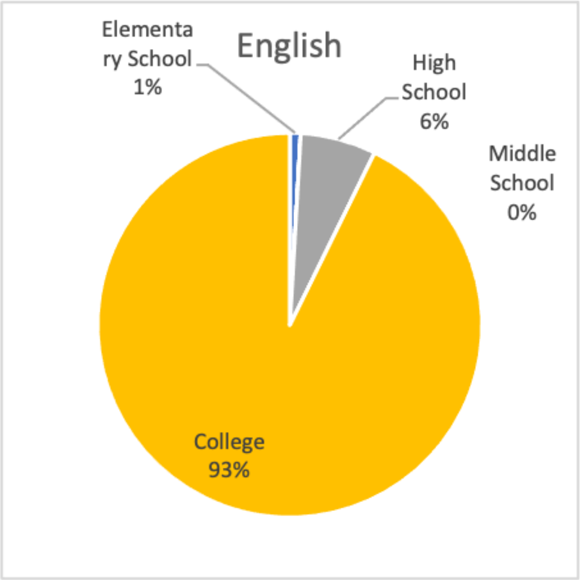


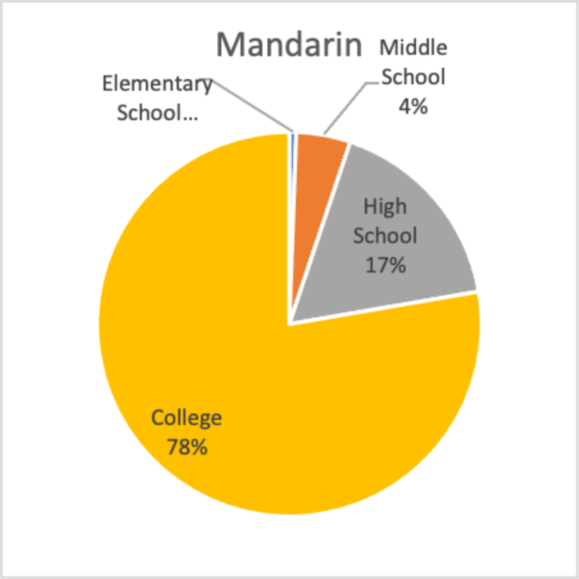


5. What is your current education level?

Current education level	English	Mandarin	Total	Total
Elementary School	1	1	2	2
Middle School	0	8	8	8
High School	7	30	37	37
College	102	136	238	238
Grand Total	110	175	285	285

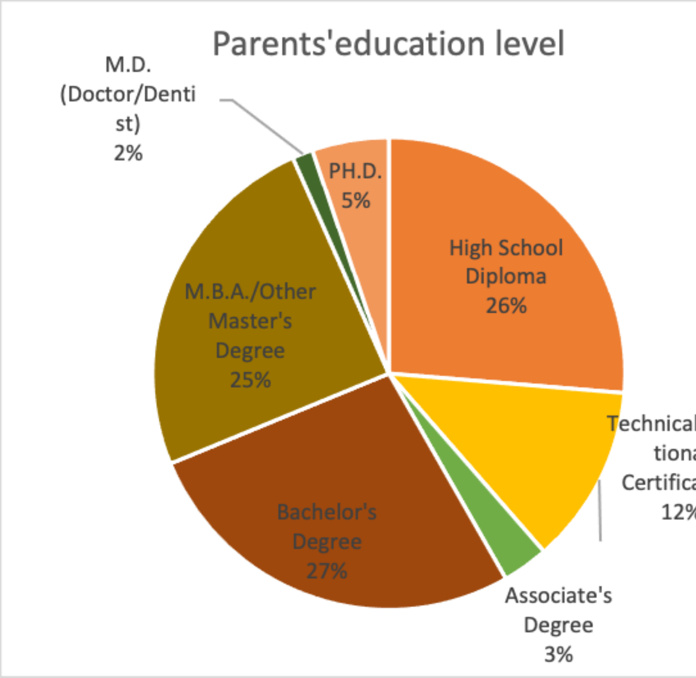

Current education level
Middle School 3%
Elementary School 1%
High School 13%
College 83%

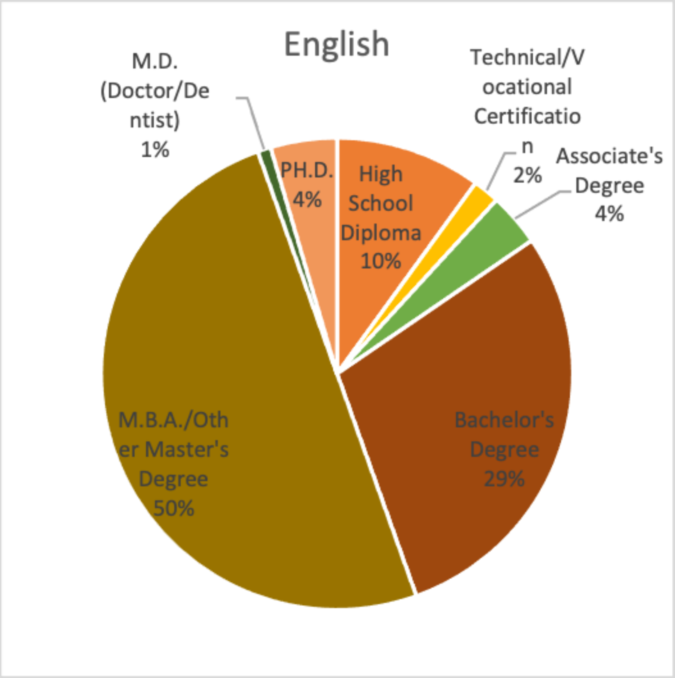

English
Elementary School 1%
High School 6%
Middle School 0%
College 93%

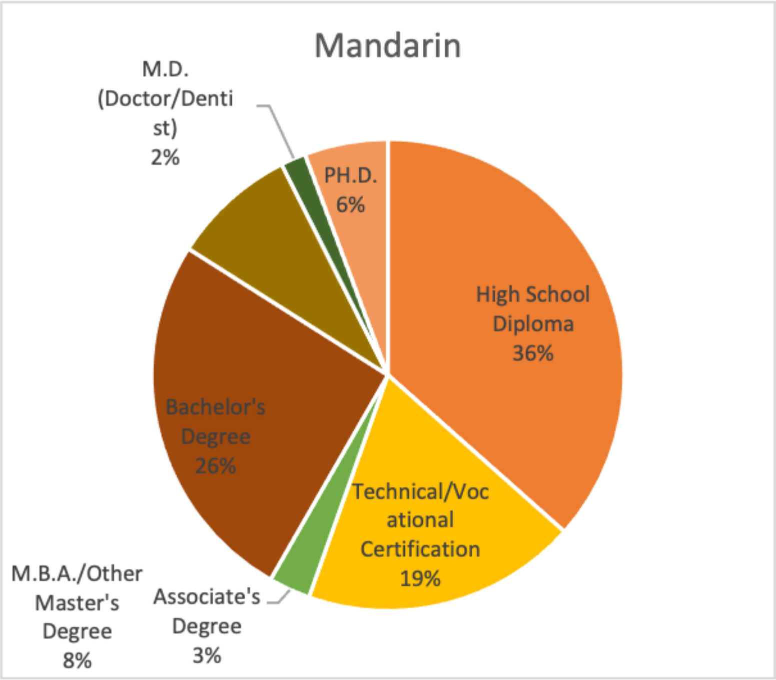

Mandarin
Middle School 4%
Elementary School...
High School 17%
College 78%

6. What is the highest level of education that one or both of your parents have received (choose one)?

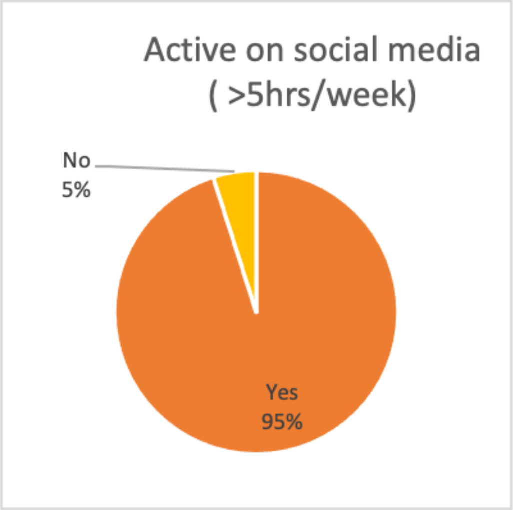
Parents' education level	English	Mandarin	Total
High School Diploma	11	64	75
Technical/Vocational Certification	2	33	35
Associate's Degree	4	5	9
Bachelor's Degree	32	45	77
M.B.A./Other Master's Degree	55	15	70
M.D. (Doctor/Dentist)	1	3	4
PH.D.	5	10	15
Grand Total	110	175	285

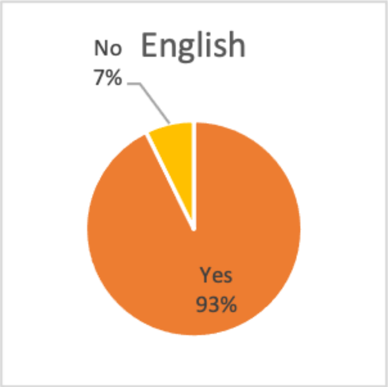


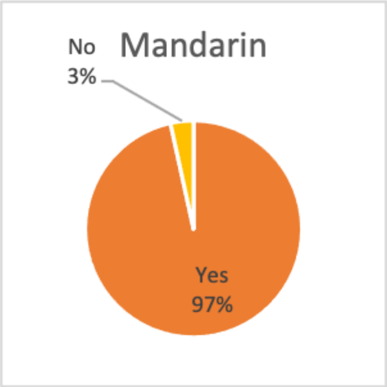




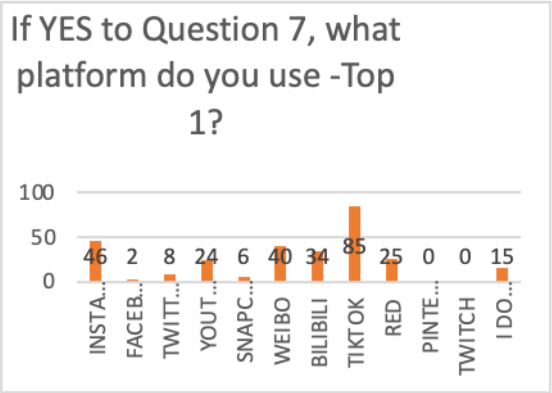
7.Are you active on social media (at least 5 hours per week)?

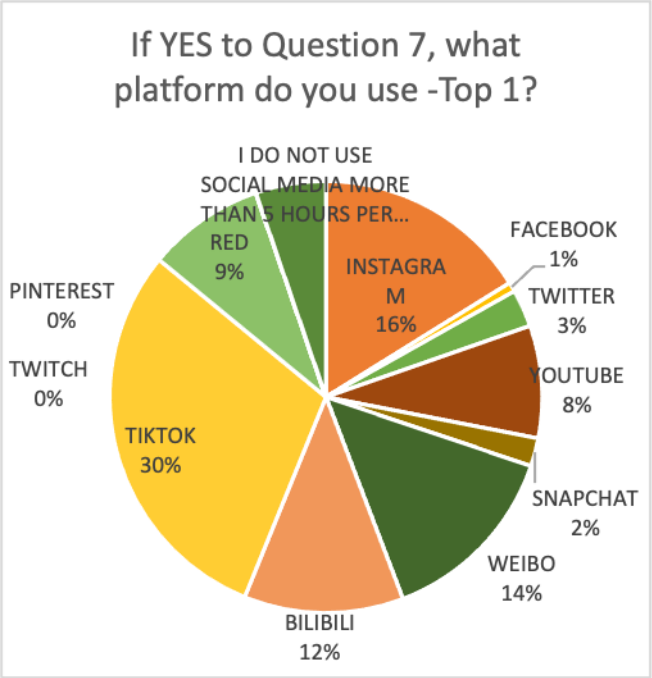


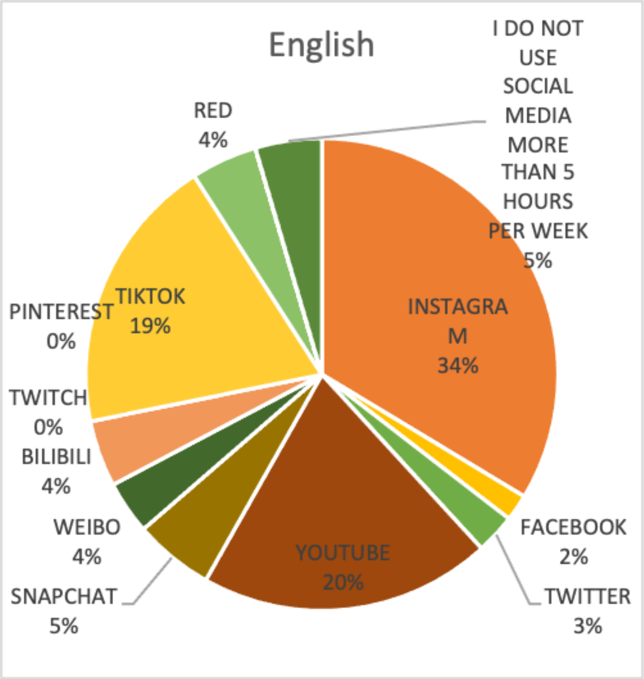


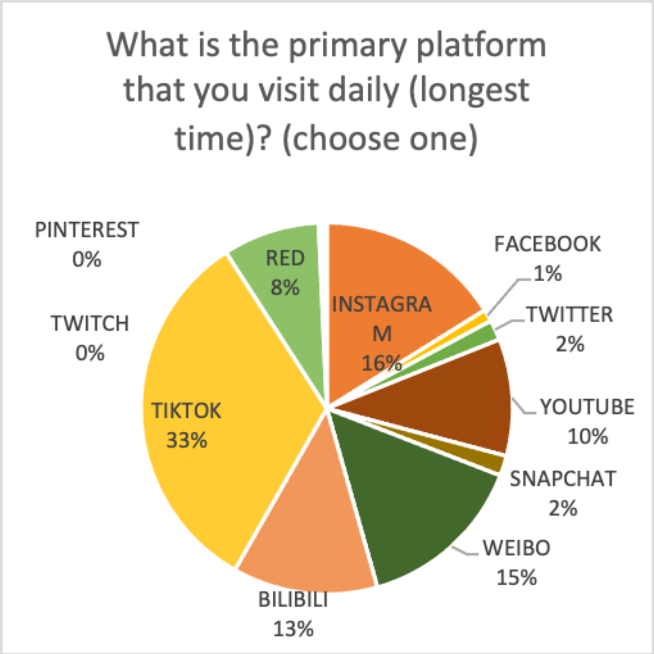


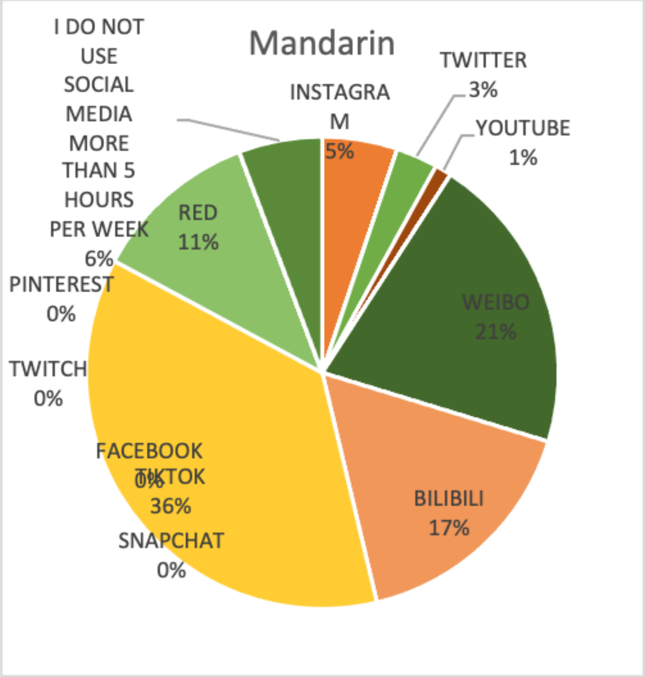
8.If YES to Question 7, what platform do you use -Top 1?


If YES to Question 7, what platform do you use -Top 1?
100
50
0
46
2
8
24
6
40
34
85
25
0
0
15
INSTA...
FACEB...
TWITT...
YOUT...
SNAPC...
WEIBO
BILIBILI
TIKTOK
RED
PINTE...
TWITCH
I DO...

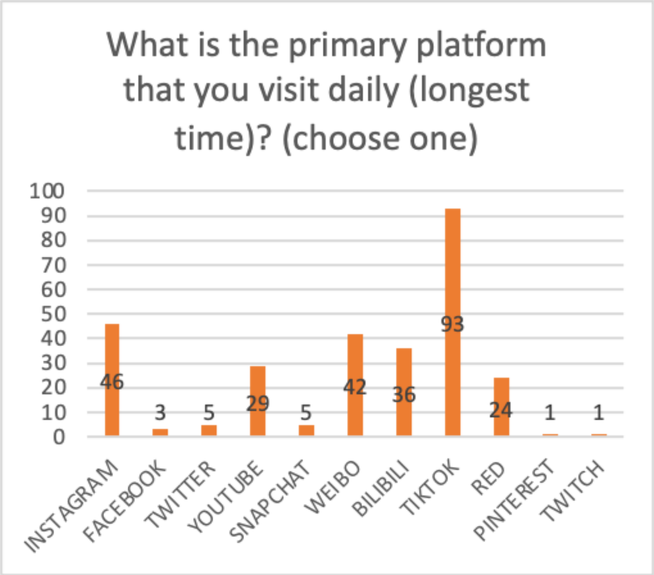

If YES to Question 7, what platform do you use -Top 1?
I DO NOT USE SOCIAL MEDIA MORE THAN 5 HOURS PER...
RED 9%
INSTAGRAM 16%
FACEBOOK 1%
TWITTER 3%
YOUTUBE 8%
SNAPCHAT 2%
WEIBO 14%
BILIBILI 12%
TIKTOK 30%
PINTEREST 0%
TWITCH 0%

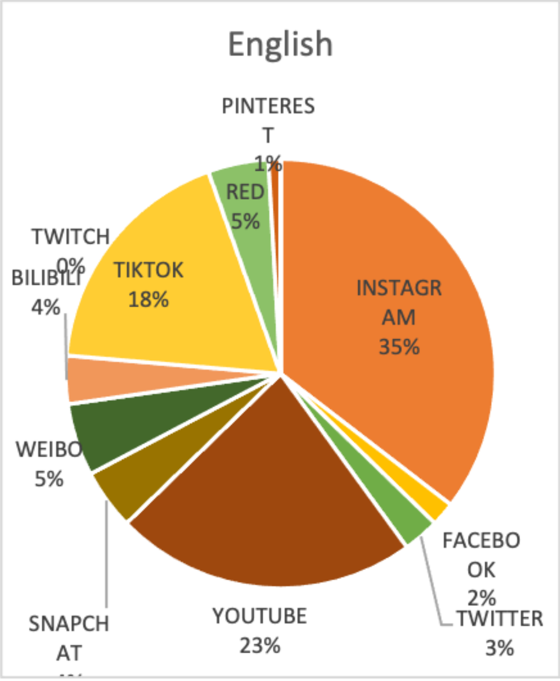

English
I DO NOT USE SOCIAL MEDIA MORE THAN 5 HOURS PER WEEK 5%
RED 4%
INSTAGRAM 34%
TIKTOK 19%
PINTEREST 0%
TWITCH 0%
BILIBILI 4%
WEIBO 4%
SNAPCHAT 5%
YOUTUBE 20%
FACEBOOK 2%
TWITTER 3%

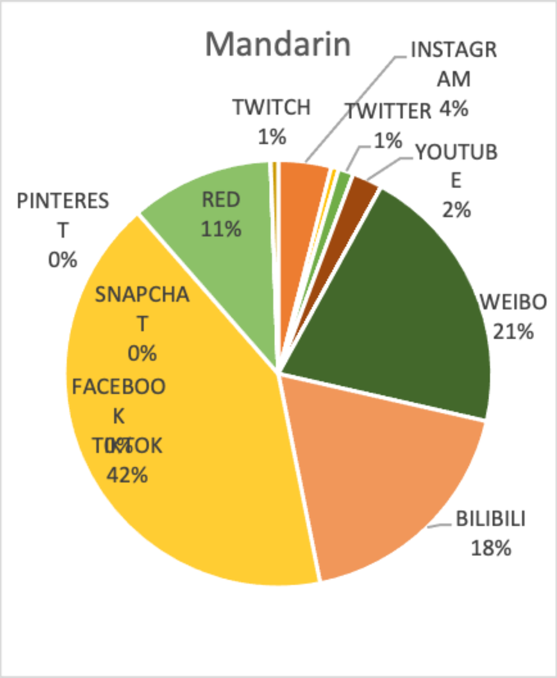




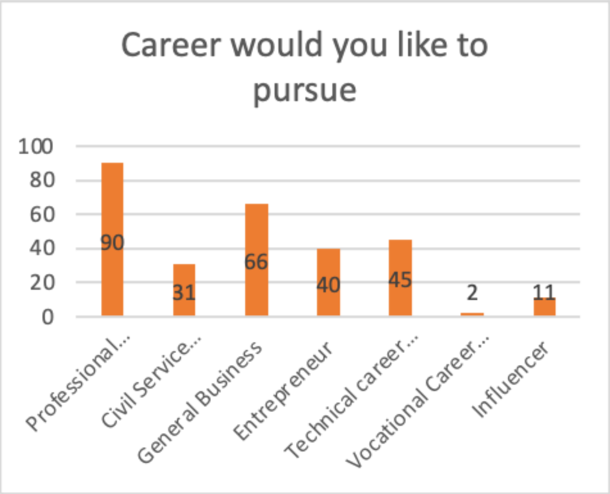
9.What is the primary platform that you visit daily (longest time)? (choose one)

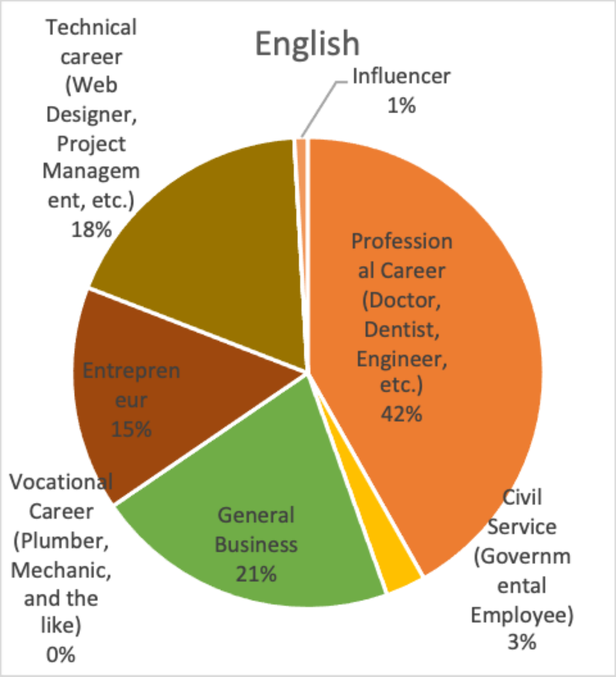


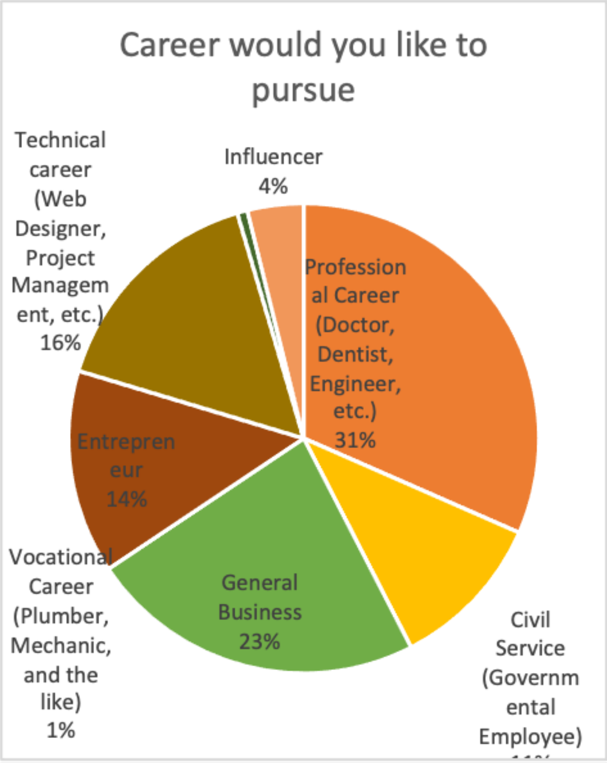


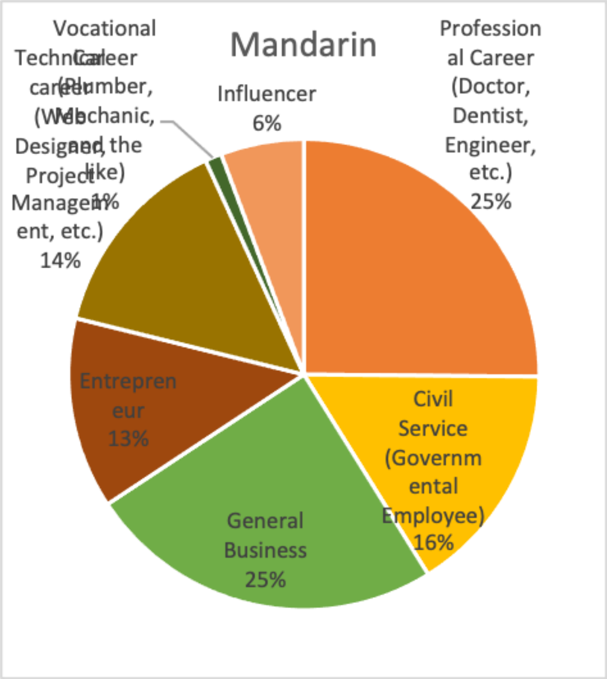


10. What career would you like to pursue?

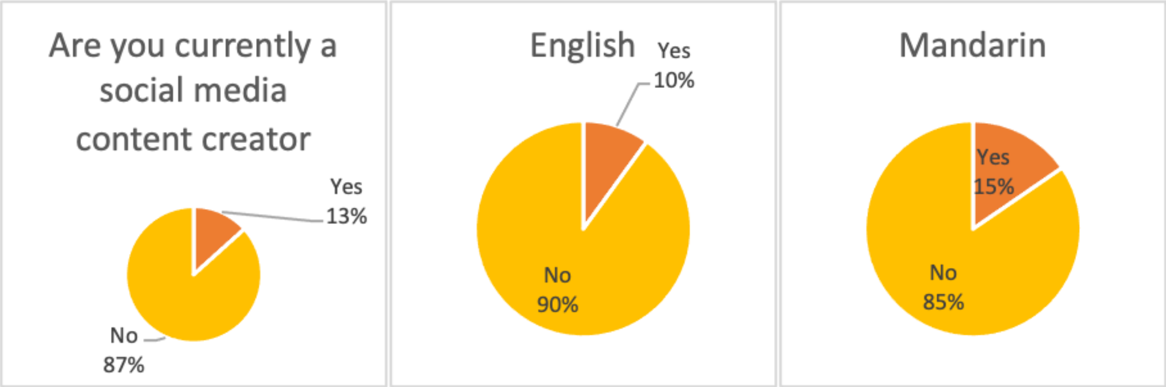

Career would you like to pursue
100
80
60
40
20
0
90
31
66
40
45
2
11
Professional...
Civil Service...
General Business
Entrepreneur
Technical career...
Vocational Career...
Influencer


English
Influencer 1%
Professional Career (Doctor, Dentist, Engineer, etc.) 42%
Civil Service (Governmental Employee) 3%
General Business 21%
Vocational Career (Plumber, Mechanic, and the like) 0%
Entrepreneur 15%
Technical career (Web Designer, Project Management, etc.) 18%

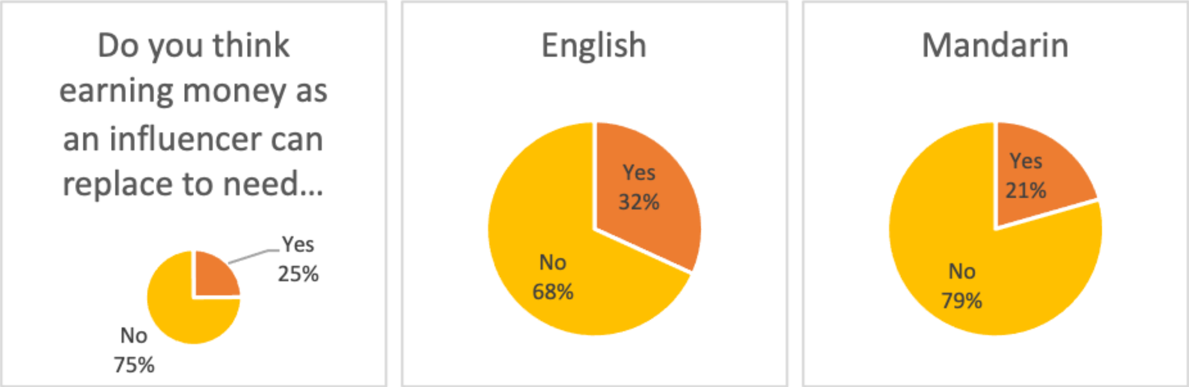

Career would you like to pursue
Technical career (Web Designer, Project Management, etc.) 16%
Influencer 4%
Professional Career (Doctor, Dentist, Engineer, etc.) 31%
Entrepreneur 14%
Vocational Career (Plumber, Mechanic, and the like) 1%
General Business 23%
Civil Service (Governmental Employee)


Mandarin
Vocational Career (Plumber, Mechanic, and the like) 1%
Technical career (Web Designer, Project Management, etc.) 14%
Influencer 6%
Professional Career (Doctor, Dentist, Engineer, etc.) 25%
Entrepreneur 13%
General Business 25%
Civil Service (Governmental Employee) 16%

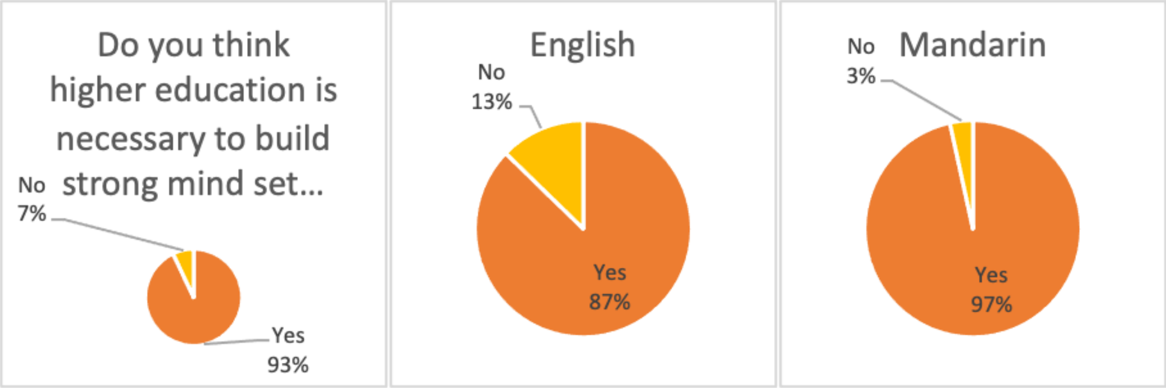
11. Are you currently a social media content creator



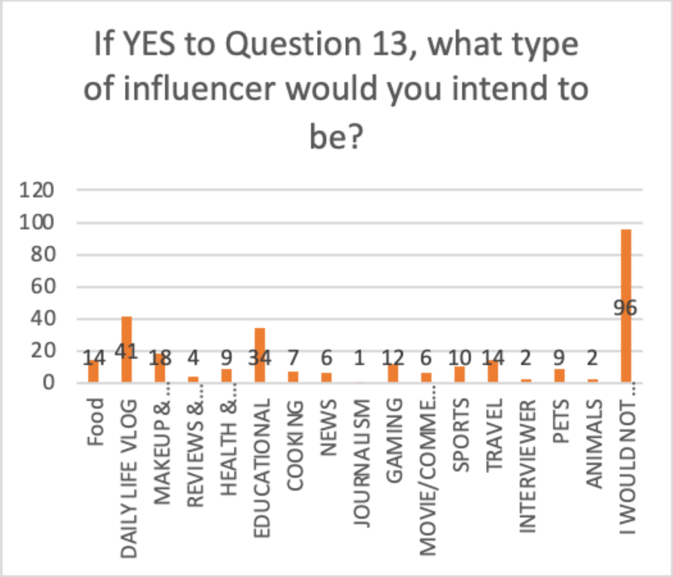
12. Do you think earning money as an influencer can replace to need to go to college without obtaining a degree?

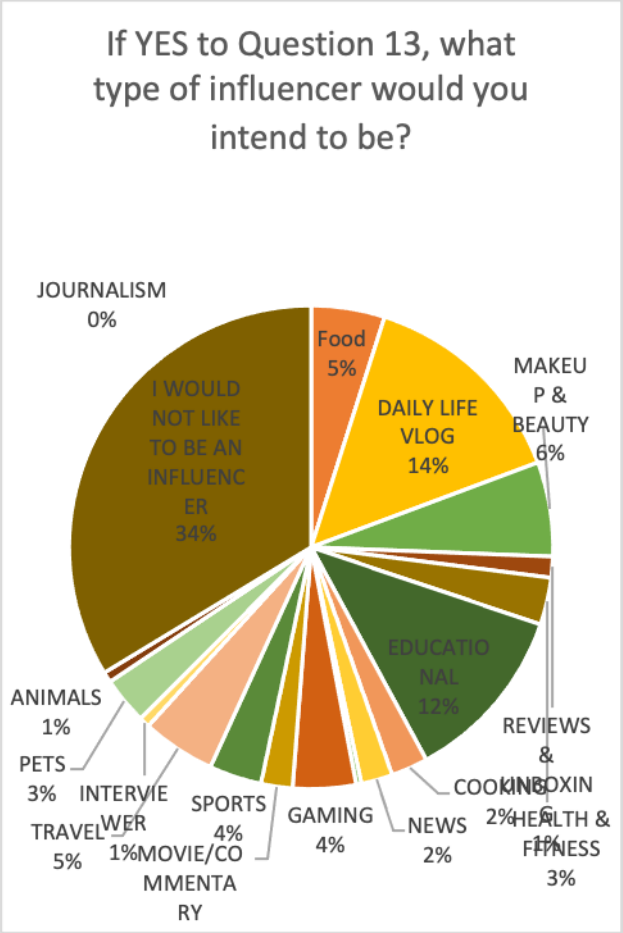


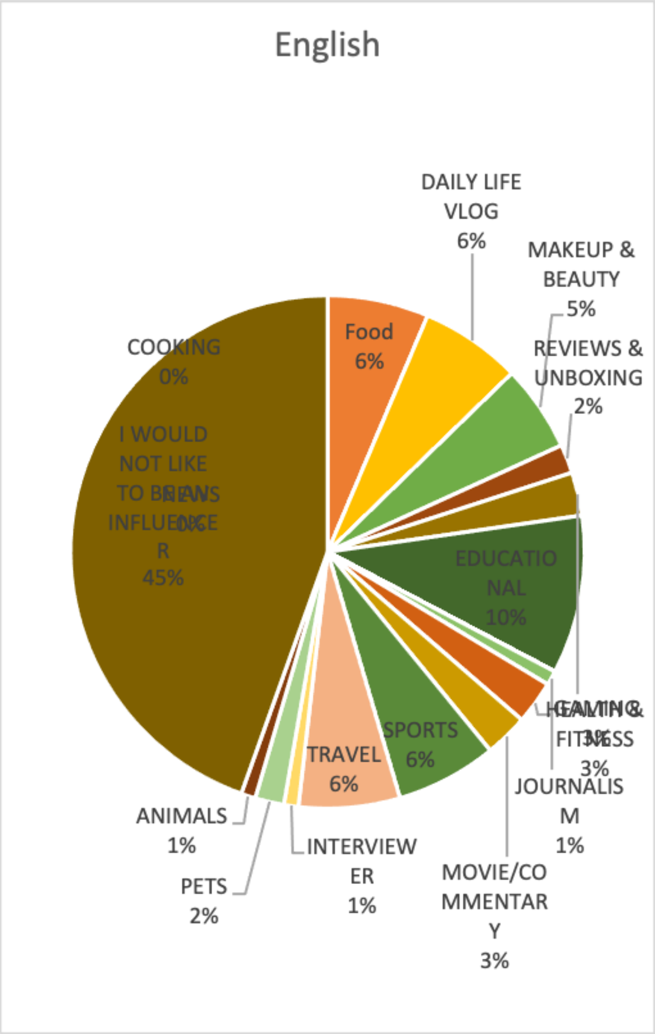
13. Do you think higher education is necessary to build strong mind set for your future today?

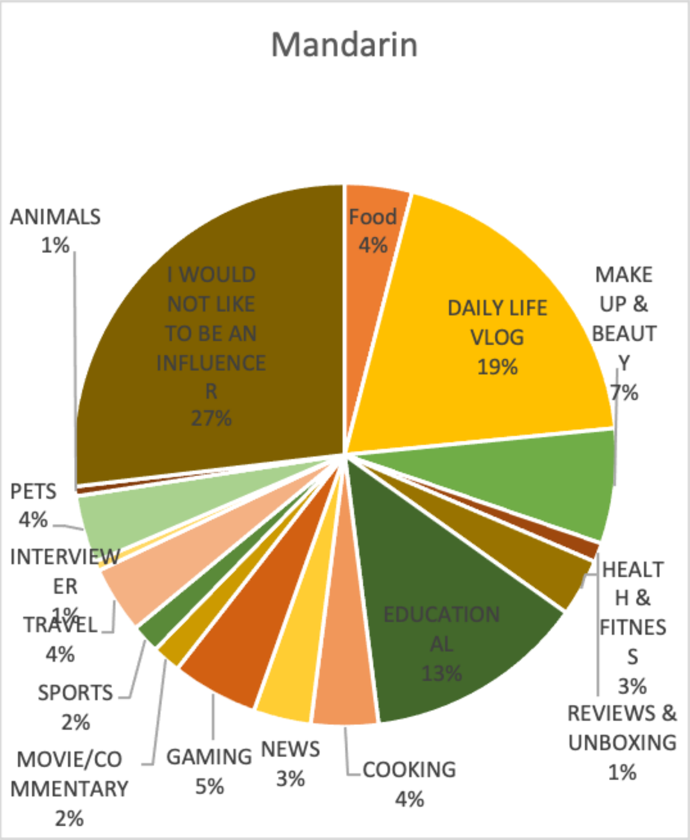


14. If YES to Question 13, what type of influencer would you intend to be?

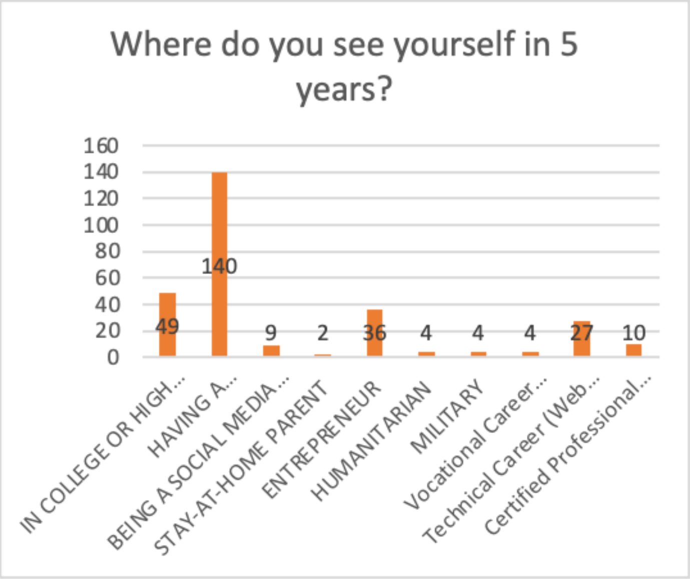


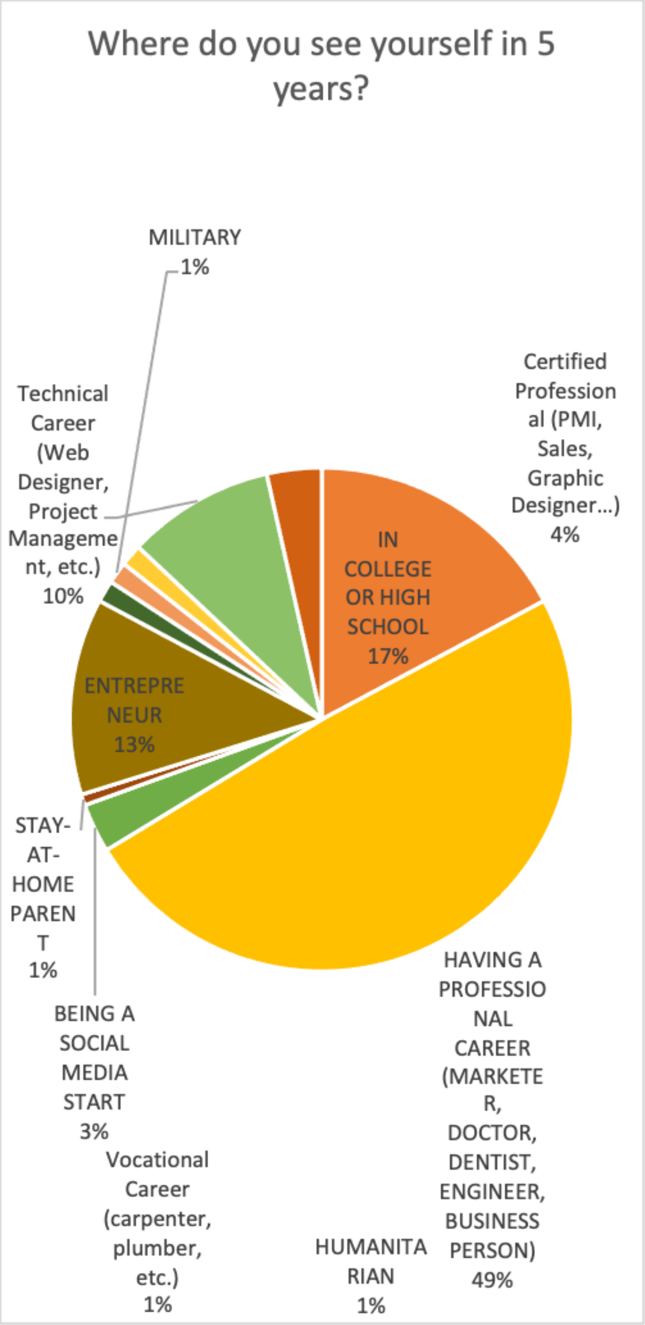


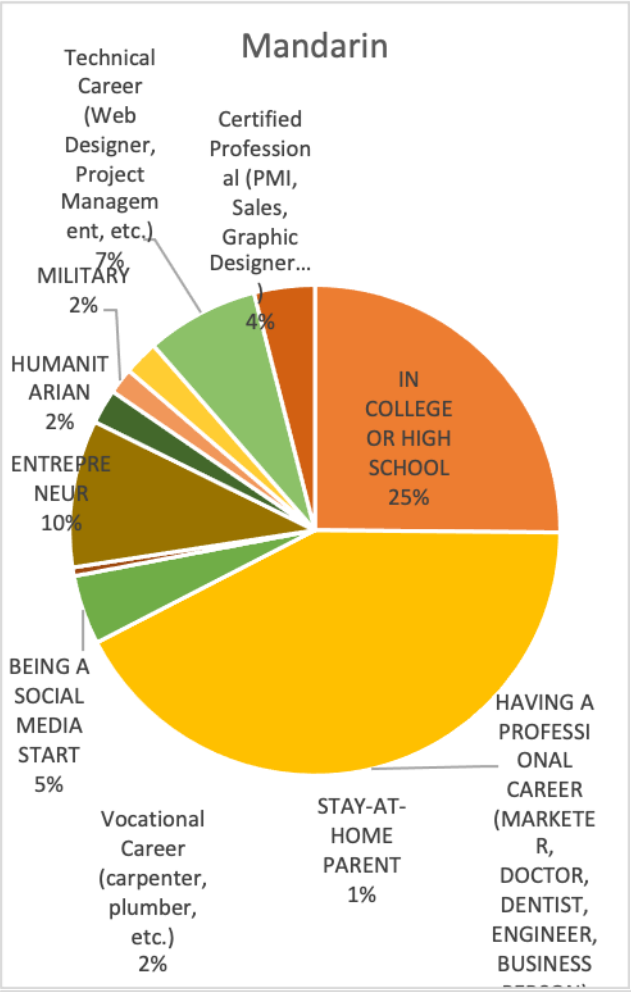

English
DAILY LIFE VLOG 6%
MAKEUP & BEAUTY 5%
REVIEWS & UNBOXING 2%
Food 6%
COOKING 0%
I WOULD NOT LIKE TO BE AN INFLUENCER 45%
NEWS 0%
EDUCATIONAL 10%
GAMING 3%
HEALTH & FITNESS 3%
JOURNALISM 1%
MOVIE/COMMENTARY 3%
SPORTS 6%
TRAVEL 6%
INTERVIEWER 1%
PETS 2%
ANIMALS 1%

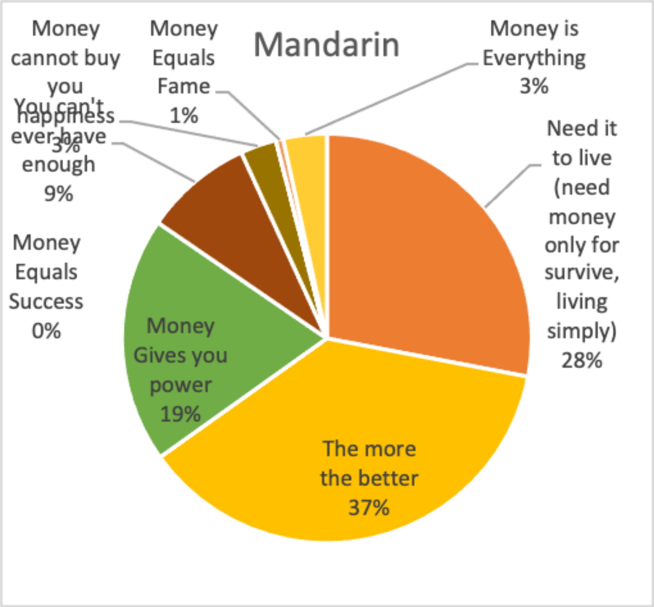


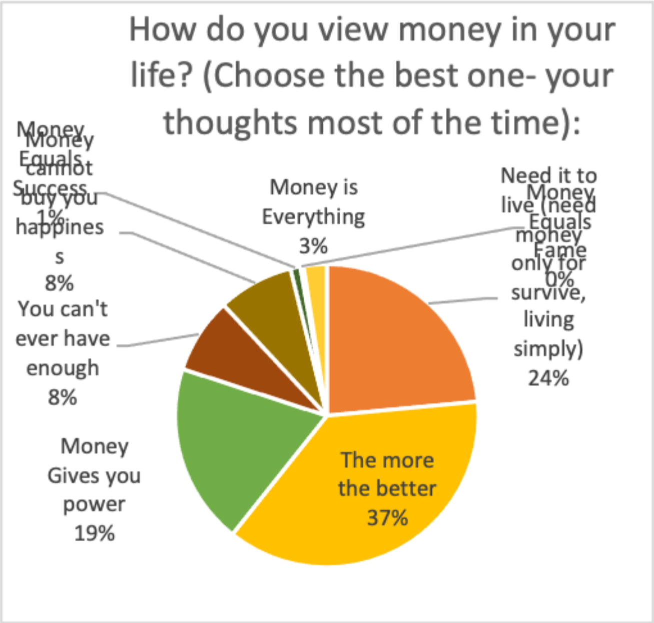
15. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?



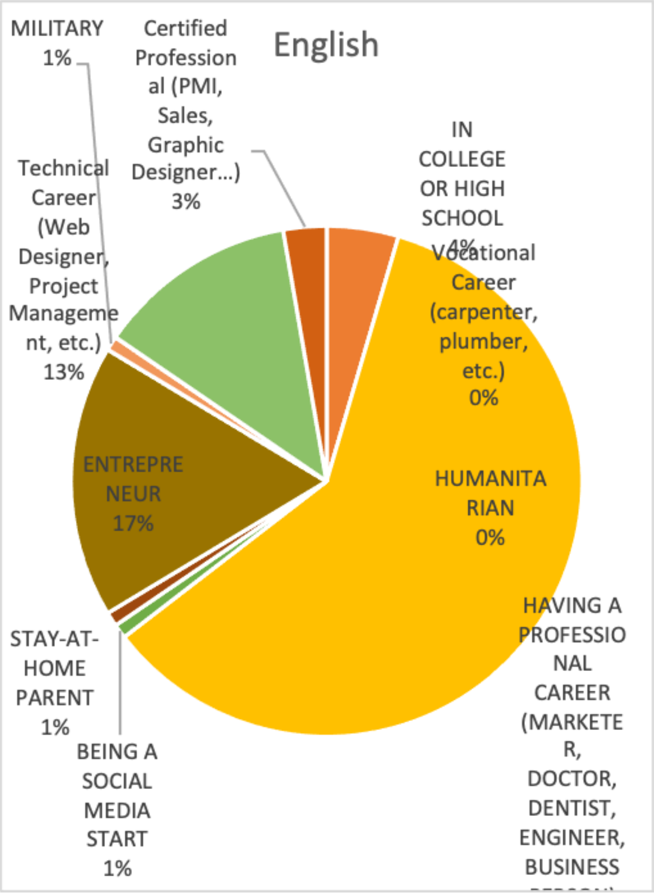

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
MILITARY 1%
Certified Professional (PMI, Sales, Graphic Designer...) 4%
Technical Career (Web Designer, Project Management, etc.) 10%
IN COLLEGE OR HIGH SCHOOL 17%
ENTREPRENEUR 13%
STAY-AT-HOME PARENT 1%
BEING A SOCIAL MEDIA START 3%
Vocational Career (carpenter, plumber, etc.) 1%
HUMANITARIAN 1%
HAVING A PROFESSIONAL CAREER (MARKETER, DOCTOR, DENTIST, ENGINEER, BUSINESS PERSON) 49%

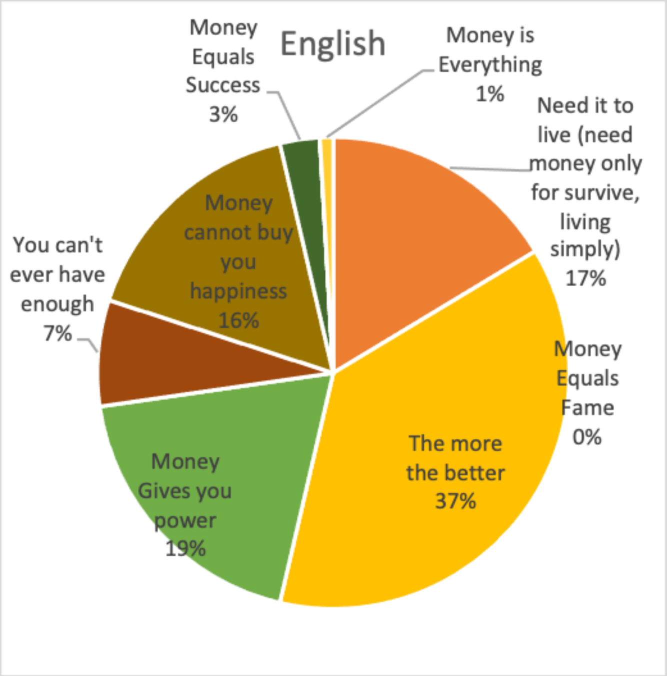

Mandarin
Technical Career (Web Designer, Project Management, etc.) 7%
Certified Professional (PMI, Sales, Graphic Designer…) 4%
MILITARY 2%
HUMANITARIAN 2%
ENTREPRENEUR 10%
BEING A SOCIAL MEDIA START 5%
IN COLLEGE OR HIGH SCHOOL 25%
HAVING A PROFESSIONAL CAREER (MARKETER, DOCTOR, DENTIST, ENGINEER, BUSINESS
STAY-AT-HOME PARENT 1%
Vocational Career (carpenter, plumber, etc.) 2%


Mandarin
Money cannot buy you happiness 3%
Money Equals Fame 1%
Money is Everything 3%
You can't ever have enough 9%
Need it to live (need money only for survive, living simply) 28%
Money Equals Success 0%
Money Gives you power 19%
The more the better 37%

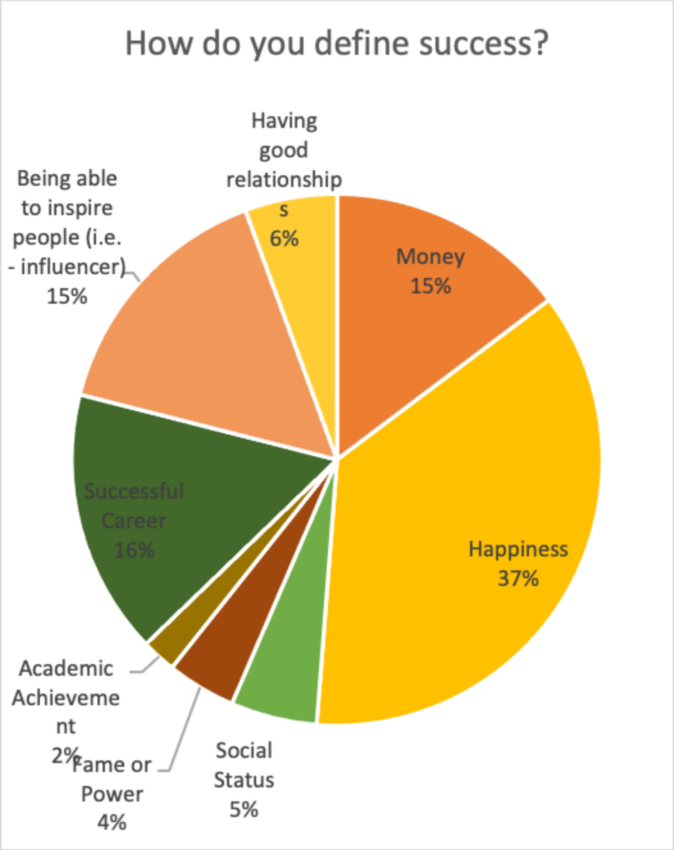


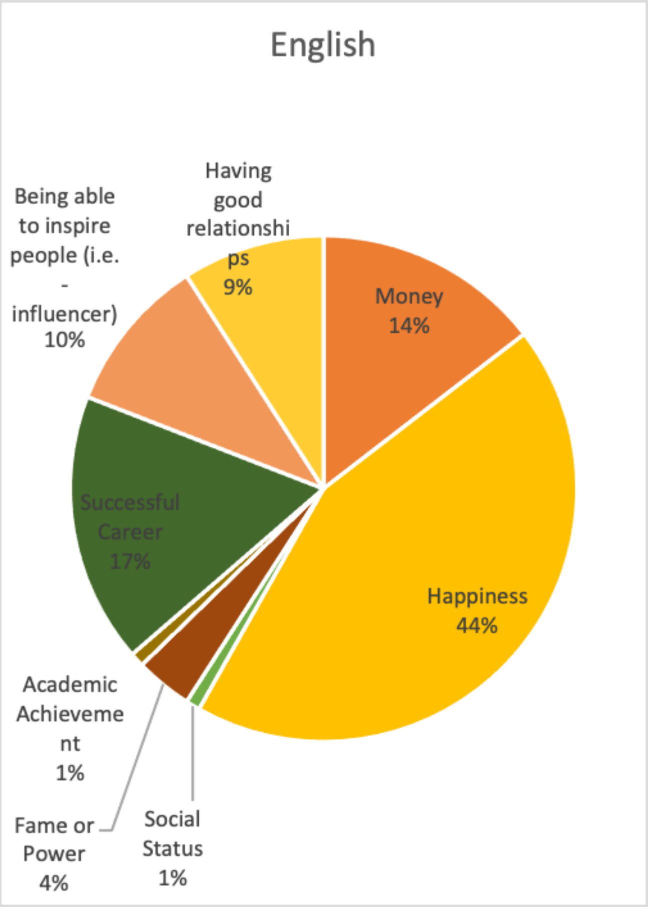
16. How do you view money in your life? (Choose the best one – your thoughts most of the time.)

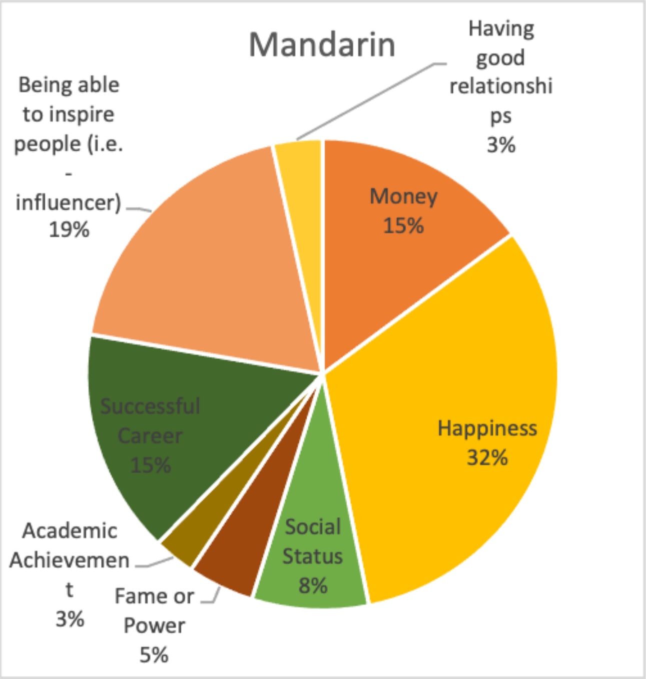




17. How do you define success?




English
Having good relationships 9%
Being able to inspire people (i.e. - influencer) 10%
Money 14%
Successful Career 17%
Happiness 44%
Academic Achievement 1%
Fame or Power 4%
Social Status 1%


Mandarin
Having good relationships 3%
Being able to inspire people (i.e. - influencer) 19%
Money 15%
Successful Career 15%
Happiness 32%
Social Status 8%
Academic Achievement 3%
Fame or Power 5%