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## Analyzing Generation Z's Internal Freedom Through Self-Concept Formation on Instagram

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## A B S T R A C T

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Generation Z forms its self-concept through Instagram. The process of forming this self-concept is related to the concept of internal freedom. This concept is used to observe the process by which Gen Z forms their self-concept on Instagram, specifically to determine whether this process is based on their own freedom or external intervention. The purpose of this study is to identify and offer new ways of understanding and applying Gen Z's internal freedom in their efforts to form their self-concept on Instagram. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a phenomenological method and in-depth interviews with eight Gen Z informants who are active personal Instagram users. The study's results reveal five key findings. The first is that some Gen Zers understand that they are not free to form their self-concept on Instagram, yet feel free to do so; however, they are actually not free either, and have felt unfree, only to eventually realize their freedom in forming their self-concept. The fourth finding is that some Gen Zers feel constrained in forming their self-concept due to their own freedom, and the last finding is that some Gen

Zers genuinely feel free in forming their self-concept on Instagram. Based on these results, Gen Z's understanding and application of their freedom in forming their self-concept on Instagram shows that Gen Z interprets every interaction they experience with others as a truth to be heeded, rather than rejected.

## Introductions

In the digital world, social media is often understood as a place for self-expression. The continuous expression channelled through social media ultimately shapes the self-concept of Instagram users—in this case, Gen Z. Therefore, one of the requirements for the formation of an authentic self-concept among Instagram users is the application of the concept of internal freedom. Internal freedom in the context of Instagram usage can be understood as freedom in the process of expressing one's identity, or what is commonly known as self-concept formation. Social media, alongside its development, has become a handy tool for shaping self-concept and supporting career advancement. (Fatmawati, 2024). This is in line with what M. Iqbal Qomaruzzaman explained, that for Generation Z and Millennials who grew up in the digital age, social media is no longer just a place for interaction, but also a place to promote themselves, showcase their skills, and build extensive professional networks. (Fatmawati, 2024).

Therefore, social media has the potential to create new problems. Namely, comparing one's own uploaded content with content uploaded by others. This comparison issue will have implications for limiting freedom in the process of forming Gen Z's self-concept on Instagram. As explained through one news channel, Gen Z, who grew up with unlimited access to digital technology, are very likely to feel inadequate because they compare themselves to others—f(Kumparan, 2024). Therefore, the subject of this study is Generation Z.

This issue of comparison is explained in a study by Paramitha, Matulessy, and Pratitis. The study demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between social comparison and dissatisfaction among teenagers who use social media.

(Paramitha, Matulessy and Pratitis, 2024). This means that there is no justification for Gen Z to be utterly free in constructing their self-concept on social media. It may be that—based on this research—Gen Z only sees social media as a tool to meet specific social standards, rather than using social media as a communication tool to construct their authentic identity. Thus, it is clear that the fundamental issue that the author seeks to reveal through this research is the nature of Instagram as a tool for communication/formation of Gen Z's authentic self-concept, or not.

The importance of conducting this research is to explore Gen Z's understanding of freedom and its application in shaping their self-concept on Instagram. This study aims to find out more about whether the self-concept constructed by Gen Z on Instagram is completely free—in the sense of being autonomous, organic, and unaffected by social pressure—or whether the process of self-concept formation on Instagram is never truly free. The benefit is to offer a new approach to the process of shaping Gen Z's self-concept on Instagram, namely by utilising internal freedom. In other words, there is always intervention from others in constructing a person's self-concept. Therefore, the data collection technique in this research was conducted through in-depth interviews.

Based on research conducted by Situmorang and Hayati, it can be seen that Instagram is indeed used as a place to construct self-concept, especially for Gen Z. (Situmorang and Hayati, 2023). Therefore, the main issue that will be explored through this study is to find out to what extent Gen Z understands and applies the concept of freedom in constructing their self-concept on Instagram. The limitations of Situmorang and Hayati's research stop at describing that Instagram is indeed used as a medium that can construct the self-concept of its users, in this case, students in Medan City (Gen Z). However, Situmorang and Hayati's research has not looked further into the process of forming this self-concept, especially when it is linked to the concept of freedom.

Therefore, this study aims to examine Gen Z's understanding and application of the concept of internal freedom in constructing their self-concept on Instagram. Specifically, this study seeks to confirm and explore further whether the self-concept constructed by Gen Z through Instagram is truly authentic, independent, or organic. There are three previous studies used as references in this study. The first study is entitled The Use of Instagram Social Media in the Formation

of Adolescent Identity, by Much Yulianto and Bulan Cahaya Sakti. This study explains that Instagram, with all its features and facilities, is used by adolescents as a medium to search for their identity. (Yulianto, 2018). Then, the second study entitled Formation of Self-Image of Communication Science Students at Dr. Soetomo University Surabaya on Instagram, by Putri and Farida. This study explains that the formation of the self-image of Dr. Soetomo students is always characterised by Instagram users' (students) understanding of themselves through dramaturgy theory. (Putri and Farida, 2018).

Finally, the third study, entitled The Process of Self-Image Formation Through Instagram Social Media: A Case Study of the Celebrity Instagram Account @ Roro_Yustina, was conducted by Aulia, Gunawan, and Yunita. This study explains that the process of self-image formation on social media, particularly Instagram, is essential for an Instagram celebrity such as Roro. This is because the public always sees the self-image of an Instagram celebrity to influence the first impression of others (the public). ,(Nurul Aulia, Desi Yunita and Wahyu Gunawan, 2024). Based on these three studies, the novelty of this study lies in the integration of two theories to analyse this phenomenon, namely symbolic interactionism and Sartrean existentialism, as well as the use of broader criteria for sources (Gen Z), which are not as specific as those used in the three studies. These two theories will be used to analyse the data obtained from in-depth interviews.

## Method

This research approach is qualitative with a phenomenological method, specifically hermeneutical phenomenology related to human existence (Heidegger) (Salim, 2006). The data collection technique used in this study was in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are interviews that involve asking questions, listening to answers, expressing interest, and taking notes on what the informants say. Therefore, in conducting in-depth interviews, it is necessary to engage in discussion in order to reveal the subjective meanings of the informants being interviewed (Neuman, 2014). The author determines potential sources by directly viewing Instagram accounts that are used to construct their self-concept and are also in line with the source criteria.

The steps taken by the author to conduct this research were as follows:

1. First, the author began the observation process to classify Instagram

accounts that were used to shape a person's self-concept, and that met the criteria for sources, which will be explained further later. The author began the observation from the Instagram accounts that follow the author on Instagram.

2. Next, after the author found candidate sources, the author asked the individuals concerned—the owners of the Instagram accounts—for their willingness to be interviewed by the author.

3. Then, the author conducted the interviews and explained the results in the findings and discussion sections. The results of these interviews were analysed using symbolic interactionism theory and freedom from Sartre's existentialist perspective.

Then, the criteria for sources used in this study are:

1. Belonging to the Gen Z age group. Gen Z itself is the generation born between 1997 and 2012(Rosariana, 2021). That is, those who are now aged 12-27.

2. Indonesian citizen.

3. Actively using an Instagram account. Active here means, first, not only using Instagram as a medium for consuming information, but also producing information/content in the form of stories, / feeds, / reels, and/or Instagram live—second, active means using Instagram at least twice a week. Third, being active also means having posts, whether photos/videos, and/or having a profile photo, and/or frequently posting stories in the Instagram Stories feature (not anonymously).

4. Not using an Instagram account to represent a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME)/shop that one owns.

5. The author's method of finding sources based on convenience sampling techniques is by utilising the author's relationships with colleagues at Atma Jaya Yogyakarta University and colleagues in Tasikmalaya, as well as using the author's Instagram story feature. The author's diverse methods of finding sources are also an effort at triangulation of sources.

Data analysis techniques are techniques that take place during the data collection process and after the data collection process. The three steps in data analysis techniques are data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. (Salim, 2006). In this study, data reduction was carried out from the results obtained through interviews. This was followed by presenting the data and drawing conclusions using symbolic interactionism and existentialism theories. The author used these two theories for data analysis by analysing each of the informants' experiences using concepts/assumptions from both theories, particularly based on the internal freedom rooted in Sartre's existentialism, so that other ways of forming Gen Z's self-concept on Instagram based on internal freedom could be identified and proposed.

In this study, the author uses two theories as analytical tools. The first theory is symbolic interactionism (George Herbert Mead), which has three assumptions: meaning is constructed through interaction; the concept of self is the motivation for behaviour; and, finally, there is a unique relationship between individuals and society (Turner, 2021). In addition to symbolic interactionism, the second theory used by the author in this study is existentialism (Jean Paul Sartre). Sartre's existentialist theory actually has many concepts, but specifically for this study, the author will use only three concepts. The first is that there is no human nature, and freedom is absolute as long as one is prepared to accept the consequences. The second is that humans are divided into *etre en soi* and *etre pour soi*. The third concept in Sartre's existentialism used in this study is related to *mauvaise foi/bad faith*, which is the implication when humans fail to deny *etre en soi by etre pour soi*.

Selain interaksionisme simbolik, teori kedua yang digunakan penulis dalam penelitian ini adalah teori eksistensialisme (Jean Paul Sartre). Teori eksistensialisme Sartre sebetulnya memiliki sangat banyak konsep, tapi khusus untuk penelitian ini penulis akan menggunakan 3 konsep saja, yakni yang pertama adalah bahwa tidak ada kodrat manusia, kebebasan itu mutlak sejauh siap dengan konsekuensinya. Kemudian yang kedua adalah bahwa manusia terbagi menjadi *etre en soi* dan *etre pour soi*. Konsep ketiga dalam eksistensialisme Sartre yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah terkait *mauvaise foi/bad faith* yang menjadi implikasi apabila manusia gagal menidak *etre en soi* oleh *etre pour soi* yang dimiliki.

## Findings and Discussion

These findings were obtained based on interviews conducted by the author with eight informants. Based on the interview results, these eight informants provided a wide variety of responses, demonstrating data saturation. The author collected varied data related to the concept of internal freedom during the process of Gen Z's self-concept formation on Instagram. Moreover, because this is qualitative research that seeks to explore the experiences of others, the diversity of experiences from the informants is an indicator that the author uses to determine that the data obtained is saturated. Specifically, this data saturation is caused by the discovery of five things related to the concept of internal freedom in the process of forming Gen Z's self-concept through Instagram.

The five things are: awareness of internal lack of freedom in the concept of self on Instagram, unawareness of internal lack of freedom in the idea of self on Instagram, changes in awareness of internal freedom in the concept of self on Instagram, the paradox of internal freedom in the idea of self on Instagram, and finally, awareness of internal freedom in the concept of self on Instagram itself. In the author's opinion, all possible variables related to the idea of internal freedom have been addressed through these five aspects; therefore, the author states that this data is saturated.

### 1.1 Awareness of internal lack of freedom in one's self-concept on Instagram

The first thing is that it turns out there are Gen Zers who are not free to shape their self-concept through Instagram. This first lack of freedom is very clearly recognised by Gen Zers themselves. For example, one interviewee (DI) reported receiving negative or put-down comments from others regarding content posted on their Instagram account. However, these negative comments ultimately made DI feel that they were no longer free.

DI explained that she had received negative comments when she posted a story with her partner. At that time, the person who made the negative comment replied to DI's story, seemingly mocking DI for posting a story with her partner on Instagram. Additionally, DI received negative comments when she was exercising. The incident was similar to the previous one, where DI received comments from others who seemed to mock him for exercising but not yet having an ideal body.

After that incident, DI felt hurt and no longer wanted to post similar things on his Instagram account.

> "Once, I was always uploading stories with my partner. Then someone commented, 'All you do is date,' 'You post about dating all the time, you'll break up and delete it later.' Once, I posted a photo of myself at the gym. I took a photo in the mirror, but the criticism/comment was like this: "Just working out, but your muscles aren't that big". From then on, I didn't want to post things like working out or anything else." (Source: Interview with DI).

DI also went on to explain that she did not feel free to use Instagram, especially when it came to shaping her self-image. DI explained that, in her opinion, many things on Instagram could not be controlled. Therefore, DI never felt free to upload content to his Instagram account. He was always worried about the response of those closest to him and his family when they saw his free content. This was because, according to DI, if he felt free, he would upload inappropriate content to Instagram. Examples of unacceptable content include content that violates local ethics/etiquette.

> Because it's uncontrollable, on my first account, whenever I posted something, I would worry about people's responses. Once, I gave alms to someone else and posted about it. My family criticised me, saying, 'Why did you post something like that? Isn't offering something you don't need to tell people about? So, since then, I've taken it down, and I don't want to post anything like that again. (Source: Interview with DI).

Finally, DI emphasised that she was afraid to upload similar content on her Instagram. DI was worried about acting 'freely' in the process of shaping her image on Instagram. She preferred to maintain her image as best as possible so that no one would speak negatively about her. This is also relevant to DI's goal in uploading content on his Instagram, which is to be accepted by netizens. DI feels that whatever he uploads on Instagram is oriented towards his followers/audience. When asked if he still wants to upload whatever he likes, DI replied:

No, because I'm afraid. I'm terrified to do something like that. I should maintain my image on social media. So, I don't want to make people talk about me. Because the world of social media is ruthless, that's how it is. (Source: Interview with DI).

DI also added that his focus in uploading content to his Instagram account is his audience (followers). When asked how long it usually takes DI to decide on uploading content to Instagram, DI replied:

I think twice before doing anything. Like, when I want to upload something, I think about whether they will accept it or whether they will criticise it. That's if it takes me less than an hour. I wonder if they will accept it or not. That's about it. (Source: Interview with DI).

This means that DI always considers whether to upload content to his Instagram account. His considerations are based on his assumptions about his followers' expectations when he uploads content.

## 1.2 Unawareness of internal lack of freedom in one's self-concept on Instagram

The second point relates to sources who feel free to use Instagram, when in fact they are not free. This lack of freedom was revealed after the source in question explained their reasons for using a second account on Instagram. LT is a source who claims to be free to use Instagram, but in fact is not. LT said that they are free to do whatever they want on Instagram. However, upon further questioning, it turned out that one of LT's considerations in using a second account was that through the second account, LT felt they no longer had to consider anything when uploading content they liked.

Oh, building LT through Instagram, in my opinion, based on what I do, has no basis. So, I am free to do whatever I want. Whether I make funny statuses, thoughtful statuses, angry statuses, or maybe I think about keeping thoughts that might hurt people, it can change according to my considerations. (Source: Interview with LT).

LT continued his explanation by saying that his reason for using a second account was that he did not need to 'think' about anything when he wanted to upload content to his second account.

> More like, I want to post something as messy as possible; it's up to me. I really don't think about it. I just want to post it, and you can really see the difference. The first one was still considered, but the second one wasn't considered at all. So, it's really different. (Source: Interview with LT).

This reason did not just appear out of nowhere. LT also explained why he felt freer when using his second personal account compared to his first account.

> In my first account, I consider myself as my parents' child, and my relationship with other people. But in my second account, it's really me. Sometimes my posts offend some people, and I don't care. I don't like to say that (consideration) is a burden, more of a responsibility. For instance, I am a member of society, I am from Kebumen, and I am friends with this person and that person. (Source: Interview with LT).

LT said that in his first account, he was not only seen as LT, but also seen as everything behind LT, whether it was his family, friends, the environment where he grew up and developed, and other things associated with the name LT itself. Therefore, LT felt that it was a responsibility that he had to maintain for as long as he lived.

### 1.3 Changes in awareness of internal freedom in self-concept on Instagram

The third finding obtained from this study is related to informants who previously felt restricted in using Instagram, particularly in forming their self-concept based on the number of likes and comments. Then he realised that the use of his Instagram account was entirely his own right and freedom. BP is a respondent who admitted that he used to feel restricted in using Instagram, particularly in uploading content to Instagram, because he always had to adjust to expectations of a high number of likes and comments. However, over time, he

came to realise this internal freedom.

> If I used to post frequently, engagement would increase. Then, perhaps because of that, I rarely posted on my feed, so engagement decreased (likes). I used to think, 'How can I get back to that level?' But then I realised it was like chasing validation. What's the point? So now I'm aware of that and don't care about it anymore. I don't care how many likes I get or how many people see my posts. (Source: Interview with BP)

BP also continued his explanation by mentioning that he only gained this awareness when he was in university. According to BP, activities in the physical world—outside of social media and Instagram—with his friends ultimately triggered BP to realise that he did not always have to focus on the number of likes and comments every time he wanted to post something on Instagram. BP emphasised that focusing on likes and comments might not be an issue if the goal was to become a content creator. However, since BP did not have that goal, he admitted that what mattered to him was that each of his Instagram posts was neatly organised.

> When I realised it, it was during university. So, more activities outside, more with friends, also made me realise it. Nowadays, just post whatever you like, regardless of how many likes, saves, or shares you get. It is possible, for example, to become a content creator. But for someone whose personal branding wants to appear ordinary, as long as it's well-organised, I don't think getting likes is that important. (Source: Interview with BP)

Other sources who experienced a similar phenomenon to BP were GM and AP. GM admitted that he had tried to beautify his Instagram account by applying a specific theme to each of his Instagram posts. However, GM eventually realised that he was not suited to and did not like always having to try to 'look neat according to the theme' in each of his Instagram posts. GM emphasised this by saying that he felt his efforts to 'tidy up and beautify' his Instagram account actually only led to a lack of freedom.

> Once, I tried to develop my account so that the feeds would be better,

prettier, more interesting. So it would be neatly organised. I tried it, but it didn't feel right. Because there was this feeling of, 'Why do I have to think so much, why do I have to be so selective?' Whenever I wanted to post something, I'd think, 'Oh, maybe this doesn't fit the theme, or whatever,' so there was no sense of freedom just to post whatever I wanted. (Source: Interview with the GM)

AP is the third interviewee who experienced a phenomenon similar to BP and GM. It could be said that AP had the worst experience compared to the previous two interviewees in terms of feeling restricted in forming their identity through Instagram. AP explained in an interview that they had previously experienced bullying for being 'too free' in forming their identity on Instagram. Then, for almost a year after that incident, AP decided not to post anything on Instagram until finally AP was made aware by the presence of people who encouraged AP to be free in forming their self-concept wherever they were, including on Instagram.

Oh, definitely. I got bullied when I uploaded a poem. At that time, I was bullied, 'Poor AP,' but in a sarcastic tone. From then on, I took a break for almost a year because I was afraid of being criticised again. But eventually, I happened to meet my coach. I told him I wasn't writing anymore. Then he asked why, 'because I got some criticism on social media, you know.' Then he said, 'It's okay, don't take it to heart.' Just consider it as material for you to improve yourself. (Source: Interview with AP).

AP also emphasized the moment when she realized her complete freedom in managing her Instagram account, including constructing her self-concept through Instagram, which began in college. In the early days of university, particularly in the second semester, AP said he learned from public speaking lectures to be more courageous in constructing his self-concept, mainly because he was a communication studies student and felt he needed to have good communication skills to tell others who he was and what he liked. However, in the process, AP also admitted that he discovered who he really was from his closest friends.

During the second semester, we studied public speaking. My lecturer advised

us to have one thing that other people could recognise us by. Finally, I started thinking, 'Hmm, yes, I guess I should start being brave enough to tell people,' and eventually, I felt free to tell people through my social media, without realising that it shaped their view of me in the way I wanted. (Source: Interview with AP).

> How to shape your self-concept on Instagram: first, I asked the people closest to me. Like, 'Hey, what kind of person am I?' 'Oh, I think you're a very feminine person, and you like pink colours and flowers, right?' So, in the end, I shaped my self-concept based on other people's views. Why? So that I would become more recognisable. (Source: Interview with AP).

Through his learning process as a Communication Science student, AP finally realized that he was free and had to have the courage to express his self-concept to other people around him.

## 1.4 The paradox of internal freedom in self-concept on Instagram

Furthermore, the fourth finding obtained based on this research is a finding that is in sharp contrast to the third finding. This finding is related to the interviewee who actually experienced internal freedom first in constructing his self-concept on Instagram, then realized that Instagram could not be used that freely because he viewed Instagram as a "play stage," even though at another point he also felt free, so he did not use the close friends feature or a second personal account on Instagram. MT is the source who explains this. According to him, Instagram is a medium that is only a place for "performance art", rather than a suitable medium for accommodating authentic self-construction.

> At first, I posted whatever I wanted. I try to be my authentic self, free from constraints. Then, I realized that an authentic self on Instagram could be dangerous. Because not everyone needs to know what you really are, people might not like you because you have become your authentic self. So as time goes by, "yes, I've posted what I want, but this is roughly the image I want to build/isn't it?" (Source: Interview with MT).

MT explained his reasons for not using close friends and/or a second personal account on Instagram, because according to him, if he felt it was not appropriate to upload certain content on Instagram, then it would be better for everyone not to see that content instead of grouping certain people either into the close friends feature or a second personal account to be able to see content in a different style.

> I felt like, yes, the only person who knows the real me is the one who actually met me. So, "either I upload it, or it doesn't exist in cyberspace at all". So it's rich, for example, if I upload it when I'm at cafe A, that's on purpose, everyone will know that I'm at cafe A. So if I upload it and someone might get hurt, either the consequence is that they get hurt, or I should never upload it at all. (Source: Interview with MT).

MT also emphasized that Instagram has specific standards, which ultimately gave rise to a debate between the issue of "who am I" and "what is acceptable by Instagram's standards". Therefore, MT's way of dealing with this debate is by trying to make MT appear as himself as much as possible, without showing the "dark side"/things that do not comply with the standards on Instagram.

Yes, it becomes a debate between "who am I?" and "roughly what is acceptable according to Instagram or internet standards," like that. And me, what I'm trying to do is, how can I be most myself, but that's just the positive thing. (Source: Interview with MT).

However, MT also explained that not all the content he uploaded on Instagram was oriented towards the number of likes and/or comments. MT actually revealed that if he cared too much about the number of followers, likes, and/or comments of other people on the content he uploaded, he was afraid that he could take away MT's "real identity". So, MT admitted that such statistics on Instagram were not very relevant.

I don't think it's as relevant as before. Because now there's a don't show likes feature, or what? That's why I always turn off the likes count. So what I focus more on is if there are comments, or if I really like this upload or not. Because I'm afraid that if I care too much about these statistics, I will feel that social networks

can take away my identity. In fact, I follow the "market" too much, even though that market is my own friends. (Source: Interview with MT).

This paradoxical phenomenon of freedom is also found in the experiences of other sources. FH is another source who experienced this paradox of freedom, although not as complicated as what MT experienced.

Honestly, when it comes to what I post, it's because I want to be the person I said earlier, so I can't post freely/carelessly on Instagram. For example, I'm just rich, I'm tidying up my boarding house, or I'm shopping. So you could say it's not free. Because I post things related to the two things I explained earlier, education and natural scenery. (Source: Interview with FH).

However, FH still feels that he does not feel free to upload whatever he wants, due to his own freedom. This means that FH feels confined by his freedom in constructing his own self-concept on Instagram.

### 1.5 Internal freedom in self-concept on Instagram.

Finally, the fifth finding obtained from this research is a finding related to the internal freedom possessed directly by the interviewee without prior experience of being unaware of his lack of freedom. This means truly internal freedom, which can be said to be absolute. The resource person is TF. TF explained that he really feels free in using Instagram.

Yes, that's normal, that's all. Because I won't change, there are some comments, but they're just normal, foolish. Yes, like yesterday's smoking post, I was followed by several lecturers. I'm scared, but let's just upload it straight away; it's foolish. Because, yes, my principle is that social media is a reflection of me in real life. Only different platforms. What about me on Instagram, what about me in real life, too? Nothing has changed. (Source: Interview with TF).

When TF receives criticism, instead of responding and correcting what other people criticize, TF chooses not to care. TF also admitted that he never

considered anything when he wanted to upload content on his Instagram. In fact, TF once uploaded content of his friend smoking just under the smoking ban on his campus.

This research provides an illustration of the understanding and application of Generation Z's concept of internal freedom—as communicators/sources—to the process of forming self-concept on Instagram. Therefore, it is important to realize first that this research cannot be an absolute basis for understanding the freedom and self-concept formation of Gen Z. This research can only be used as a small illustration to understand this topic. Especially for psychologists and HRD who may often interact with Gen Z, hopefully, this research can provide a little understanding of how Gen Z thinks about themselves. Moreover, the concept of freedom itself cannot only be studied from one perspective - Sartre's existentialism - alone. It is very possible for the concept of freedom to be analyzed using other approaches that are not yet understood by the author. The findings of this research indicate that Gen Z's understanding and application of internal freedom in forming their self-concept on Instagram has not yet entirely occurred.

Based on the data findings presented in the previous section, the author succeeded in categorizing the concept of understanding and implementing Gen Z's internal freedom into five parts. The first part is the part that shows that there are sources who, until now, do not feel free to construct their self-concept on Instagram. Based on the explanation presented by DI, the initial assumptions in this research can be proven to be true. The truth is that it turns out there are people who feel confined, "imprisoned", or isolated from their own freedom when trying to construct their self-concept through Instagram, one of them is DI, and - if referring to previous research in the literature review - Roro Yustina. The difference with DI, Roro Yustina is a celebgram who perhaps deliberately chose to become a celebgram along with all the consequences, one of whom is trying to appear perfect in front of the public, (Nurul Aulia, Desi Yunita and Wahyu Gunawan, 2024). This also shows that this research complements research by Yulianto, which only explains that Instagram is used by teenagers to find their identity (Yulianto, 2018). It doesn't matter to what extent the identity is authentic, which is proven to be inauthentic based on this first piece of evidence.

This is relevant to one of Sartre's famous adages, which is explained through

his existentialism, that "other people are hell". Sartre emphasized the significant influence of other people's judgments on our self-judgments. According to him, the presence of other people can be detrimental when our relationship with that person is poor, as we become overly dependent on them. This, in his view, is what hell means(Wibowo, 2011), including dependency on forming their self-concept on us. Even though the theory of symbolic interactionism explains that behavior is motivated by the self-concept, ultimately, it is the decision to reject the self-concept (etre en soi) that is important to consider when referring to Sartre's existentialism. The use of Sartre's existentialism is also a complementary difference between this research and research by Putri and Farida, which only reaches the process of forming the self-concept of students at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, University of Dr. Soetomo Surabaya, and is always characterized by their understanding of themselves through dramaturgical theory. It doesn't come down to how this understanding is applied using one's freedom.

Moreover, this is also in accordance with what the author explains in the background section, that perhaps the formation of Gen Z's self-concept on Instagram is not based solely on itself, but rather on external intervention as an implication of the speed that accompanies the development of the digital world. The speed in the digital world explains that in this fast-paced world, it is possible for us not to reflect deeply. As a result, our choices—including in this case the formation of our self-concept on Instagram—become shallow and irresponsible.

Superficial because we then become lazy to think again, reflect again, regarding the reasons we formed our self-concept on Instagram using external intervention, instead of ourselves. Irresponsible because it will then be easy for us to blame others when someone criticizes the content we upload on our Instagram account. In other words, forming a self-concept based on external intervention rather than oneself is actually a choice born out of a response to the fast-paced digital world.

Apart from that, it can also serve as a material for reflection on whether we have genuinely been free in representing ourselves through the communication media around us. Or have we been constructing other people's self-concepts through ourselves? Just as the second assumption of symbolic interactionism theory suggests, the self-concept serves as the motivation for behavior. However, this does not mean that the second assumption of the theory of symbolic interactionism

is wrong, it just means that if it tries to be integrated with existentialism-Sartre, then the second assumption of the theory of symbolic interactionism can at a certain point, be replaced with the concept of etre pour soi in rejecting the etre en soi explained in existentialism-Sartre (Khusna, 2020).

The big question, "Who am I?" seems complicated to answer when we cannot be sure of the first reflection. Although humans themselves indeed consist of actual units in the form of experiential events which are actively processed to create themselves in a new way, armed with the past which they objectively inherit, to then become one individual among other individuals(Sudarminta, 1991). Thus, the paradox between the question of "who am I" and the difficulty of answering "who is human" becomes an extraordinary tension that humans must grapple with every day.

These actual units are relevant to the assumptions of symbolic interactionism theory, which posits that humans construct meaning through interaction with other humans. (Turner, 2021). This meaning does not exist in isolation, but is created through interpretation based on the communication process that occurs. In this case, the communication process that occurs can be seen through other people who may have/often provided criticism, input, or even bullied us because the content we upload on our Instagram does not comply with the "standards" that that person recognizes as the truth.

DI is an example of a person who immediately interprets criticism, input, and even bullying as the truth that he must follow. In fact, DI—including us— has the right to heed the criticism/input given, according to the extent to which we consider the criticism/input to be accurate. As explained by Sartre in his existentialism, true freedom is an effort etre pour soi to reject etre en soi (Khusna, 2020). For example, like the fifth finding previously explained. That TF has received comments several times that criticize/give input to TF regarding the content he uploads on his Instagram. However, TF completely ignored him and even acted indifferently towards him. TF rejects the criticism he receives. TF explained that he would not change because of the criticism/input given to him, as long as he thought it was still within reasonable limits according to his own standards. This really shows TF's freedom as 'etre pour soi' in rejecting 'etre en soi,' as seen in his criticism of others.

On the one hand, this appears quite liberating. It can be said that TF has

effectively understood and implemented the concept of internal freedom. In fact, perhaps TF, as a student in the philosophy study program, really understood Sartre's existentialism and was then able to internalize its essence in the form of his rejection of this criticism. However, it is also necessary to criticize the TF if they are too consistent in rejecting all input/criticism given to them; perhaps this is an indication of stubbornness, which has the potential to harm the TF's life in the future. This is what in Sartre's existentialism is called la nausee (nausea)/ anxiety. According to Sartre, this anxiety can arise because of human awareness that he is somehow "cursed" to be free, until then it is this awareness that brings humans to a kind of "feeling of nausea"/"wanting to vomit" (nausea) because they have to reject everything (nature) while simultaneously creating/filling in their own value, with their own responsibility (Wibowo, 2022).

If we refer to Sartre's existentialism, it is true that as long as TF understands the consequences and is responsible for his freedom, then TF is free to do anything. In other words, as long as the etre pour soi can reject the etre en soi with full awareness of its responsibilities, then there should be no problem. However, it is also important to remember the limitations of humans in doing everything, including considering the consequences and responsibilities that they might face one day. Therefore, the conflict between these two things - between awareness of the consequences and responsibility for freedom, carried out with the humility to admit that "I am still limited and need other people" - seems to be a tug of war that will continue as long as humans live.

Another discussion is contained in this research, specifically in the second finding section. When LT feels free to use Instagram to form his self-concept, even though he is actually not free, this is interesting because it turns out that our awareness of something is not necessarily as complete as we think. Just as the first finding, this second finding can also serve as material for reflection, allowing us to recognize our limitations and explore other possibilities within our beliefs about the truths in life. This aligns with the previous point, that the conflict between these two things - between awareness of the consequences and responsibility for freedom carried out with humility in admitting that "I am still limited and need other people" - feels like a tug-of-war that will continue to occur as long as humans live.

The intervention of others in our lives is also necessary at a certain point. Perhaps our belief in something is not entirely accurate, or is actually wrong. Our

lack of awareness in assessing something indicates that we need others to "pat us on the shoulder" (remind us) while guiding us back to the "truth," even though the truth itself is very contextual. This is in line with the third assumption of symbolic interactionism theory, that there is a unique relationship between individuals and society, which is in line with the public communication context used in this research, where interactions occur not only interpersonal or group, but broader than that. Namely, communication that occurs between one person and society, which in this case occurs on Instagram. When viewed from an existentialist perspective, this unique relationship between individuals and society reaches a warning stage, not as a benchmark of truth that must be heeded, because the person concerned must be able to reject it. Also, if the case is like the third finding, where you feel that you are not free, then you can realize your freedom.

To be able to realize freedom, other people are still needed, as explained by the three sources (BP, GM & AP) above. They explained that at first, they felt they were not free; however, returning to the question of symbolic interactionism, there is a process of interaction through which meaning can be created between humans and each other (Turner, 2021). This resulted in these three sources being able to realize their freedom in forming their self-concept through their respective Instagrams. This problem between consciousness and unconsciousness has implications for many other aspects, including the process of interpreting every interaction that has occurred with other people so far. Because, in this way, the meaning created as a result of the interpretation may be recognized as something true, but in reality, the meaning in itself (das ding an sich) is not like that.

The key point to emphasize in the context of "other people" is that, according to Sartre's existentialism, humans are what they make of themselves; this is the fundamental principle of Sartre's existentialism (Circles Indonesia, 2022). Therefore, based on Sartre's existentialism, there is no human nature, no female nature, no male nature, and so on. Humans are human to the extent that they can determine for themselves what they want to be with responsibility and awareness of the consequences of each choice. In other words, freedom is actually absolute as long as the human being who exercises his freedom is aware of the consequences he will receive when exercising that freedom.

Through Sartre's principle of existentialism, what needs to be continued is that even though the "truth" is that humans are without nature, in the process, in its

implementation, humans are still able to—even sometimes have to—involve other people as part of an actual unit/entity that can present other choices for the human being concerned. At first glance, it seems paradoxical because, on the one hand, Sartre's existentialism reminds us that other people can become hell. However, on the other hand, referring to symbolic interactionism, humans still need other people, one of whom is to remind and awaken humans from their limitations and lostness.

However, this paradox actually has an answer: the presence of these choices is still a choice, as the author explained in the previous paragraph, because it is the human being who ultimately decides whether they will be an etre pour soi, rejecting etre en soi, or not, just like AP, who realized his concept after AP asked his friends directly. This means that other people are still needed as sources of information, including those who help make people aware and remind them, not as the only source of absolute truth in determining our own self-concept. Moreover, because in Indonesia itself, the more dominant culture is collectivist(Judha, 2023). So, cultural context can also serve as a reference for truth when we are uncertain about answering the paradox of freedom.

The final finding is related to the paradox of freedom itself (fourth finding). It is called the paradox of liberty because it turns out that freedom itself can produce unfreedom. The proof is that FH and MT initially felt free, then, after determining "certain standards" in their lives, as a result of their own freedom to decide these things, they were no longer free because they had to continually return to those standards as long as they still believed these standards were the proper standards. This is relevant to what Sartre explained through his adage, "other people are hell."

At this point, FH and MT could be said to be in hell because they allowed other people to objectify (la reification) them. They create standards that are internalized through circulating hegemony. The problem is, this hegemony comes from other people as entities who limit FH and MT's freedom in forming their self-concept on Instagram. Although paradoxical, the way they internalize hegemony as an entity that limits their freedom on Instagram is also born from their own freedom. This is what Sartre also explains through mauvaise foi, or an inauthentic attitude, which rejects one's own freedom (Wibowo, 2022).

We often have this attitude of mauvaise foi every day. We claim that we are not free, and hide behind the unfreedom that we have actually created ourselves,

or at least allowed to happen, without rejecting it. Could our freedom lead us to forms of unfreedom that we may not be aware of? Does etre pour soi function as it should—reject etre en soi—or does it create another etre en soi-etre en soi? Let's take it further: whether we decide our lives every time. We are truly deciding in the sense of not carrying our old identity, or are we actually prolonging this into a vicious circle with no end?

## Conclutions

Based on the problem formulation, as well as the five findings and discussions that have been carried out previously, the main conclusion that can be drawn is that Gen Z's understanding and application of internal freedom in forming their self-concept on Instagram have not yet been entirely realized. Based on the sources who were interviewed, it was found that some sources interpreted the interaction (etre en soi) that occurred directly as the truth, without first attempting to reject the etre en soi. In fact, the ability to reject interaction—as an etre en soi—is owned by everyone who interprets interaction in the communication process; meaning is born from this process. Apart from that, other sources felt free to form their self-concept on Instagram, even though they were not truly free, or sources who initially thought they were not free, then ultimately realized their freedom. This suggests that Gen Z's understanding and application of internal freedom in shaping their self-concept on Instagram may be influenced by external factors. This also demonstrates a unique relationship between individuals and society, known as symbolic interactionism.

In this research, a resource person (TF) also demonstrated his internal freedom. Considering TF's educational background as a philosophy student, it would be interesting for future researchers to explore the relationship between a person's academic background and their understanding and application of internal freedom in forming a self-concept on social media, not just Instagram. It is also interesting to see how other generations (outside Gen Z) who also use Instagram shape their self-concept. How far are the differences between generations, what differentiates them, and so on? For Generation Z itself, the author advises not to always "agree" with every intervention provided by other people. Instead, try to organically form your self-concept on Instagram by being aware of your internal freedom.

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