



Analysis of ums students' reception of the meaning of independence and freedom for gen-z in grab's advertisement: "Merdeka melaju dari A sampai Z"

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the reception of students from Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) towards the meaning of "independence" and "freedom" in the Grab advertisement "Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z." Using a qualitative descriptive method with the encoding-decoding reception analysis approach by Stuart Hall, this research categorizes the audience into three positions: dominant hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. Data was collected through interviews with five informants representing various study programs at UMS. The results show that the interpretation of the advertisement varies, influenced by individual backgrounds, experiences, and perceptions. Specifically, this study contributes to communication literature by enriching the understanding of how the values contained in the advertisement are perceived by Gen-Z audiences, as well as how personal experiences and social contexts influence the interpretation of the advertisement's message. The implications of this research are significant for communication and advertising practices, especially in designing campaigns that can more effectively respond to the diverse perceptions of young audiences who hold varied values and views on independence and freedom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The terms Baby Boomers, Millennials, Generation X, Y, and Z have become popular topics of discussion among society. These terms do not merely refer to differences in age based on certain birth year ranges but also encompass differences in habits, mindsets, and characteristics unique to each generation. According to BBC, Dr. Alexis Abramson, an expert in "generational cohorts," stated that the year of birth or the time a person is born can influence their attitudes, perceptions, values, and behaviors (Liyanti & Dahara, 2021).

Among the generational groupings based on birth years, Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has recently garnered significant attention. Generation Z, popularly referred to as Gen-Z, possesses characteristics considered unique and starkly different from previous generations. Unlike earlier generations, Gen-Z grew up immersed in a fully established digital technology environment. In other words, Gen-Z is recognized as digital natives—individuals who have been accustomed to using technology from an early age due to the advanced digital developments surrounding them. Moreover, this generation grew up amid concerns about climate change, shifts in financial landscapes, and the major global pandemic, COVID-19 (Salguero et al., 2024).

According to an article by McKinsey & Company, Generation Z is now dominating both the market and the workforce. Having grown up in an era profoundly influenced by digitalization, Gen-Z prioritizes flexibility and convenience. Amid such significant digital influence, various companies—from media to product and service providers—are competing to simplify customer experiences. The proliferation of websites and applications demonstrates this convenience, supporting everyday needs (Pramulyasari & Amalia, 2021).

Given Gen-Z's strong societal influence and the ongoing technological advancements, it seems fitting that advertisements and campaigns frequently target Gen-Z as their primary audience. Advertising plays a crucial role in supporting business success. It serves as a means of informing consumers about products, instilling positive perceptions, and attracting them to purchase (Abby & Irwansyah, 2021).

Over time, advertising has evolved across various media platforms. While advertisements were once confined to print media, they have now expanded to audiovisual media, such as television, radio, digital billboards, and the internet. To increase sales of goods and services, advertisements are often broadcast in highly visible locations. In other words, advertisements are replayed consistently to capture attention and create lasting impressions, enabling audiences to make informed product choices aligned with their needs (Aisyah et al., 2021).

To attract customers, advertisements must be crafted with fresh and engaging ideas. One of Indonesia's leading online transportation service providers, Grab, has wrapped its advertisements in ideas that resonate with current trends. Grab, which was founded in 2012 in Malaysia, initially operated as an online taxi transportation provider (Resika, 2022). To celebrate Indonesia's 79th Independence Day, Grab launched an advertisement titled "Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z" (Freedom to Move from A to Z). This advertisement not only carried commercial value but also conveyed messages about the meaning of independence for Gen-Z. The ad, uploaded on YouTube with a duration of 3 minutes and 51 seconds, featured Gen-Z passengers on Grab Bikes with their trendy catchphrases (Arifa et al., 2024).

As a giant in the online transportation industry, Grab has designed unique advertisements to attract customers. The concept presented in this particular ad stands out, differing from typical transportation ads that often highlight discounts or service benefits. This advertisement incorporated a song performed by musicians Refo and Fauna, known for their "catchy" music and "absurd" lyrics that align with Gen-Z's lifestyle (Arifa et al., 2024). Titled "Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z," Refo and Fauna collaborated with other figures to depict values associated with Gen-Z. Grab's creative approach in this advertisement underscores that compelling ads aren't just about combining elements but also crafting innovative messages that leave lasting impressions on consumers (Shella & Sukendro, 2023).

Grab Indonesia has clearly established a broad market segmentation. To date, transportation remains a primary need. Consumers, therefore, seek accessible transportation options. According to a survey by Goodstats in June 2023, over 21 million people in Indonesia use online transportation services. Goodstats further explained that the ease and speed offered by such services make them a preferred choice for Indonesians (Alim & Dirbawanto, 2024), including Gen-Z, the largest consumer group of online transportation services. A study by McKinsey identifies Gen-Z as "The Communaholic," a generation highly inclusive and keen on engaging in communities through technology. This active generation requires transportation solutions to support their activities.

Grab's advertisement featuring Gen-Z riding its transportation services conveys a message of freedom of expression in choosing their lifestyle. This is evident in exchanges such as the lyric "Semangat Gen-Z ku, kamu lebih dari Z, kalo penasaran kita S," which is met with a model's playful response, "Spontan, Uhuyy" (Tania, 2023). The song, performed by Refo and Fauna, encourages young individuals to fill the lyrics with their thoughts without external interference.

Considering these factors, this study aims to explore and understand the reception of the audience, particularly Gen-Z students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, toward the messages conveyed in Grab's advertisement "Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z." Since generational differences have become a hot topic of discussion and Gen-Z is often the focus of advertisements by various brands (Sakitri, 2021), this research employs a qualitative descriptive

method and Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding reception analysis model to assess how the students interpret the concept of "freedom" conveyed in the ad.

Previous research by (Kristyowati, 2021) highlighted the differing approaches required for handling Gen-Z compared to previous generations. Gen-Z's formation is influenced not only by their birth years but also by the sociohistorical context they face. This generation is characterized by their appreciation for diversity, desire for social change, openness to sharing, and target-oriented mindset. According to Kristyowati, Gen-Z is not inclined to read lengthy narratives but prefers visual and graphic information accessible online. Consequently, older generations often view Gen-Z as not adhering to traditional values, while Gen-Z considers older lifestyles outdated. Hence, older generations responsible for educating Gen-Z need to adopt approaches aligned with their characteristics, leveraging AI and personal branding to address contemporary challenges (Afista et al., 2024).

Research by Anisha Nur Pratiwi on the advertising message in the MS Glow X Keanu campaign "Capek itu Nasib, Good Looking itu Pilihan" found three categories of audience reception: the Dominant-Hegemonic Position, where audiences align with the advertisement's intended message; the Negotiated Position, where audiences accept the message but with differing opinions on aspects such as appearance and quality; and the Oppositional Position, where audiences reject the advertisement's message. Pratiwi utilized Stuart Hall's reception analysis theory to understand how informants interpreted the message conveyed by MS Glow (Noer et al., 2023).

This study distinguishes itself from previous research in several key ways. While other studies have explored advertising targeted at Gen-Z, like the MS Glow X Keanu campaign, which primarily examined audience reception to a beauty product advertisement, this study focuses on the freedom message communicated through Grab's "Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z" advertisement. It specifically investigates how Gen-Z students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta interpret the concept of "freedom" within the context of this advertisement, using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model to analyze their responses. This focus on freedom as the central theme of the advertisement sets it apart from other studies that might have analyzed other core messages, such as heroism or attractiveness, as seen in MS Glow's campaign or Grab's "Pahlawan Top Up" ad. The emphasis on Gen-Z's unique characteristics—such as their digital nativity, desire for social change, and preferences for visual and interactive content—further grounds this research in the specific context of their lives.

As for Grab's advertisement reflecting Gen-Z's freedom, it can be seen in several aspects of the campaign. The ad's use of Gen-Z passengers on Grab Bikes with their trendy language and playful exchanges symbolizes a sense of liberation, not just in transportation but in self-expression. The playful lyrics of the song, which encourage spontaneous contributions and non-conformity, capture the essence of Gen-Z's desire for autonomy and individuality. The notion of "freedom" in this context resonates with Gen-Z's rejection of traditional structures and expectations, aligning with their values of inclusivity, creativity, and flexibility. This type of freedom emphasizes choice—be it in transportation, identity, or how they engage with the world around them—reinforcing the idea that Gen-Z values opportunities to express themselves and move through life on their own terms.

In summary, this research's focus on "freedom" in the Grab advertisement provides a unique lens to examine how Gen-Z interprets themes of independence, choice, and self-expression within the framework of a digital and globalized society. Grab's advertisement taps into these values, aligning with the generational traits that distinguish Gen-Z from previous cohorts.

Furthermore, Grace Shella and Gregorius Genep Sukendro's study on heroism in Grab's "Pahlawan Top Up" advertisement emphasized the importance of applying the AIDCA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Conviction, Action) concept in creating engaging advertisements. This approach fosters sustainable consumer interest in the products offered. Grab's "Pahlawan Top Up" advertisement represents heroism through the sacrifices, struggles, and courage of Grab drivers who provide top-up services for OVO balances, facilitating easier service use and payments (Sukmawati et al., 2024).

This study is significant due to the ongoing debates surrounding generational differences, particularly the contrasting mindsets, behaviors, and habits of Gen-Z, shaped by technology,

compared to previous generations (Setianingrum, 2024). Through the “Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z” advertisement, Grab seeks to convey that Gen-Z holds values beyond what others perceive, creatively presenting these ideas without losing the ad’s commercial appeal.

This research stands out from other studies discussing Generation Z or Grab advertisements for several key reasons. First, it focuses specifically on how Gen-Z perceives the concept of “freedom” as depicted in Grab’s advertisement “Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z.” Many studies have analyzed generational differences in terms of behaviors, mindsets, and consumer trends, but few delve into how these differences are expressed through specific advertisements—especially in the context of emerging market economies like Indonesia. Grab, as a major player in the transportation industry, uses innovative and targeted advertising that resonates with Gen-Z’s values, including flexibility, freedom of expression, and social change. By studying how university students interpret these messages, the research provides deeper insights into how Gen-Z’s values are reflected in advertising and how these ads impact their perceptions and behaviors. Moreover, the use of Stuart Hall’s encoding-decoding reception model allows for a nuanced analysis of how the intended message of “freedom” is interpreted across different audiences. Previous studies might have focused on general consumer trends or advertising techniques, but this study addresses how one specific ad communicates values to an audience with a unique generational perspective. This is particularly relevant given the importance of digital marketing and the growing influence of Gen-Z in shaping market trends.

The selection of students from Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) is significant for several reasons. First, the university is located in Indonesia, a country with a rapidly growing middle class and a large, tech-savvy young population. Gen-Z in Indonesia, particularly students at UMS, are likely to have similar characteristics to other Gen-Z individuals around the world, such as high digital engagement and a desire for social change. These students also represent a specific demographic group that is in a stage of transition from education to the workforce, making them prime targets for advertisers like Grab. They are consumers who are highly influenced by digital media, making their reception of digital ads an important area of study.

In conclusion, this research aims to explore how students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta perceive the concept of “freedom” for Gen-Z after watching Grab’s “Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z” advertisement. The objective is to determine whether Grab’s intended message is effectively received (Shella & Sukendro, 2023).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a reception analysis approach based on the encoding-decoding model introduced by Stuart Hall to understand audience interpretations of the Grab advertisement “Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z.” The descriptive research type is used to clearly and factually describe and interpret objects, aiming to present specific social conditions. The data presented by the researcher are entirely authentic and obtained during the data collection process. According to Sugiyono, qualitative methods produce in-depth data, uncovering meanings beyond the surface, which serves as a primary objective of qualitative research (Faturossyiddin & Hidayati, 2023). This research was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, involving interviews with five student informants from various study programs as research subjects. The study utilized a purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting informants based on specific criteria needed by the researcher, ensuring diversity in terms of study program and gender (Faturossyiddin & Hidayati, 2023).

The criteria for informants determined by the researcher include the following: students from Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta enrolled in different study programs and semesters, as these backgrounds may influence the Gen-Z interpretation of “independence” and “freedom” in varying ways; both male and female participants, to reflect the broader focus of the study on Gen-Z as a whole; aged 18–24 years, which corresponds to the typical age of university students who are actively engaged with current technological and social trends; technologically literate and aware of current trends, targeting young individuals who actively follow prevailing trends; and having watched the Grab advertisement “Merdeka Melaju dari A sampai Z,” ensuring they can provide relevant interpretations of the advertisement’s concept.

Five informants can provide insightful qualitative data, but whether they are "sufficient" depends on the specific goals of the study. For a qualitative study, particularly one focused on understanding audience interpretations, the aim is typically not to achieve statistical generalization but to explore depth and nuance. However, the small sample size may limit the ability to fully capture the diversity within the larger Gen-Z population at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS). A larger sample would allow for a broader range of perspectives, but in qualitative research, it's more important to ensure that the sample is purposefully selected to reflect a range of relevant characteristics (as the study did with gender, study program, and other factors).

The criteria of study program and semester are relevant because students in different academic disciplines and at different stages of their education may have varied life experiences, values, and perspectives. For example, a student in a social science program may have different conceptualizations of freedom or independence compared to someone in a technical field, as their educational exposure might shape how they view social issues or personal liberties. Similarly, students in different semesters may be at different stages of maturity or academic development, influencing how they interpret broader cultural concepts like independence. These factors contribute to a diversity of interpretations that the study aims to capture. While the details of how social, cultural, or technological factors were explicitly addressed in the interview process are not provided in the description, it seems likely that such factors would influence Gen-Z's interpretation of freedom, especially considering the target demographic is actively engaged with current technological and social trends. Social and cultural influences, such as the values of independence and autonomy in contemporary society, might shape how Gen-Z interprets messages of freedom in advertisements. Technological factors, like the prevalence of online platforms, apps, and digital media, are also crucial because they shape how young people perceive mobility, choice, and empowerment—elements that are central to the concept of "freedom" in Grab's advertisement. Ideally, the researcher would have considered these influences through questions or prompts in the interview to better understand the role they play in the interpretation process.

Data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and literature review. Interviews were conducted directly with informants selected based on the predetermined criteria. Observations involved watching and analyzing the content of the advertisement. The literature review involved analyzing prior research findings. The data analysis technique followed these steps: first, the researcher collected data through interviews with the informants. Second, the researcher transcribed the responses and analyzed them using the encoding-decoding process (Littlejohn & Foss, n.d.). To ensure data accuracy and validity, triangulation was performed by reviewing the data obtained during the interview process to identify similarities and differences in the interpretations of the message by the informants.

Observation in this study helps deepen the understanding of the informants' interpretation of the advertisement by capturing their non-verbal reactions, such as facial expressions, body language, and emotional responses. These cues provide insight into how they engage with the ad beyond their verbal explanations, revealing additional layers of meaning that might not be fully articulated in an interview setting. The researcher can also assess if prior knowledge or external influences impact their interpretation, enriching the overall understanding of how the advertisement is perceived. In encoding-decoding analysis, the researcher first examines the encoding process, which involves analyzing how the advertisement is constructed—looking at its messages, symbols, and narratives intended by the creators. Then, during the decoding process, the researcher analyzes how the informants interpret the ad, considering whether they adopt the preferred, negotiated, or oppositional reading of the message. The decoding process reflects how the audience's personal and cultural backgrounds shape their understanding of the ad. To ensure the research results accurately reflect true perceptions, methods such as member checking, where informants review the findings, and peer debriefing, where colleagues offer feedback, can be used. Prolonged engagement with the research context, rich descriptions of the study, and maintaining an audit trail further strengthen the validity and credibility of the findings by providing transparency and reducing researcher bias. These combined mechanisms support the accuracy of the interpretations and ensure that the research captures the authentic perceptions of the informants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with each informant over a span of two days, specifically on November 2, 2024, and November 5, 2024. These interviews aimed to understand the responses of each informant to the message content presented in the advertisement, allowing the researcher to categorize the informants into specific message recipient groups. Prior to the interviews, the researcher ensured that all informants had watched the Grab advertisement titled "Melaju Merdeka dari A sampai Z (Faturossyiddin & Hidayati, 2024)".

The interviews were conducted with five informants from Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, each representing different study programs. The informants included Informant 1 (RJ, 22 years old), Informant 2 (LH, 20 years old), Informant 3 (ARP, 21 years old), Informant 4 (YI, 20 years old), and Informant 5 (MS, 19 years old). The selection of these informants was also based on their experiences using the Grab application.

The research began by showing the Grab advertisement "Melaju Merdeka dari A sampai Z" on YouTube. The researcher observed the reactions displayed by the informants and then conducted interviews to explore the reception of each informant.

Based on the interview results, each informant interpreted the advertisement's concept and the notion of independence conveyed in the "Melaju Merdeka dari A sampai Z" advertisement differently. These interpretations provided insights into the research objectives. The messages received by the informants were analyzed using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding method. Each informant elaborated on their interpretations, which varied from one another. This variation occurred because the audience holds the power to interpret and reconstruct the meanings they receive (Pradhita & Junaedi, 2019).

a. Interpretation of the Grab Advertisement Concept "Merdeka Melaju Dari A Sampai Z", advertisements that present a concept different from the usual ones tend to capture the audience's interest. In addition to the concept, the advertisement should carry a message that resonates with the audience, leading to approval, new perspectives, or even influencing the consumer's decision to use the product. This can be seen from the results of the interviews conducted by the researcher. Each audience member interpreted the message of the advertisement differently.

RJ, the first informant, stated that the Grab advertisement was very appealing to watch because it was relatable to young people today. According to RJ, the ad was different from other typical advertisements, as it targeted Gen-Z. RJ commented: "This ad is really interesting. Grab is able to invite young people, especially Gen-Z, to express themselves. As we know, Gen-Z is dominating the digital technology field today. They can't live without smartphones, so it's clear they need Grab as a transportation app to make their activities easier" (RJ, 22 Years).

RJ also added that Grab's concept was excellent and easy to accept by Gen-Z, especially since the advertisement features people with different backgrounds and jobs, yet all have unique styles. "...the concept is unique, you see men and women with different jobs and different styles. But they can all follow the song and even make spontaneous lyrics (Arsita -Agustinus et al., 2020)" (RJ, 22 Years). Similarly, ARP (21 Years), the third informant, agreed with RJ, describing the Grab ad as having a concept that was very appealing. The ad showed several young people riding Grab Bikes, singing fun and trending songs popular among Gen-Z.

"The concept is fun and exciting. Refo and Fauna are singing the song, which has quirky lyrics that relate to Gen-Z life, and even the ad models are singing along, using words that are trending. Gen-Z is known for not wanting to complicate things and preferring convenience because of technology, and Grab really wants to embrace Gen-Z, showing that taking a bike ride isn't always unpleasant" (ARP, 21 Years). YI (21 Years), the fourth informant, also agreed with the previous informants. She mentioned that the Grab ad celebrating Indonesia's Independence Day was very interesting. She expressed that Gen-Z interprets the word "merdeka" (independence) as a form of expressing oneself joyfully.

"This Grab ad is fun and enjoyable. It's clear that freedom of expression is one form of independence. The ad is well-packaged and fresh, and the song is easy to listen to. The ad is colorful, with vibrant outfits worn by the models, refreshing to the eyes. They also interact with other drivers, making it feel like the ad was made as naturally as possible" (YI, 21 Years).

LH (20 Years), the second informant, mentioned that the concept was quite appealing and in line with Gen-Z's image. The ad depicted freedom and enjoyment, but for LH, the word "merdeka" (independence) could mean different things for different people. For her, freedom of expression wasn't the only definition of "merdeka." She shared: "The ad is very interesting and aligns with Gen-Z's image. The advertiser seems to want to tell Gen-Z that they can express themselves by singing or doing whatever they want. However, freedom of expression shouldn't be directly equated with independence. The meaning of independence varies from person to person" (LH, 20 Years).

MS (19 Years), the fifth informant, offered a different view from the others. He found the ad less relatable to Gen-Z. He explained that although Gen-Z was born within the same time frame, they don't all share the same character, especially in how they interpret "merdeka."

"This ad is only targeted at a specific character, and although Gen-Z was born between 1997-2012, not all of them are the same. Plus, since this ad was released to celebrate Independence Day, I feel the concept doesn't quite connect with the essence of the independence moment" (MS, 19 Years). From these interviews, it can be observed that the Grab ad "Merdeka Melaju Dari A Sampai Z" elicited various responses from the audience. Most informants felt that the ad's concept was exciting and relevant to the life of Gen-Z as depicted in the ad.

b. Interpretation of the Concept of Independence in the Grab Ad "Merdeka Melaju Dari A Sampai Z", in interpreting the concept of independence in the Grab ad "Merdeka Melaju Dari A Sampai Z", each informant had different views and assessments. The varying backgrounds of each informant played a crucial role in these differing opinions. This is because audiences are segmented based on numerous factors (Kamil et al., 2023).

RJ, the first informant, believed that the concept of independence in the ad was about young people freely expressing their feelings through the song they sang. According to RJ, the ability to freely express oneself is synonymous with being "merdeka" (independent). The ad also inspired young people to be more confident in their values.

Similarly, ARP shared the same opinion as RJ, emphasizing that independence for young people is about feeling free and being able to do things they enjoy. The internet technology now makes it easy for people to perform different activities. He noted that Grab conveyed the message that, through their app, people could easily travel anywhere.

YI (21 Years) also viewed independence in the Grab ad as not just freedom from colonialism, but as the freedom to express oneself, the ease of using technology, and the ability to do what one loves. She added that the young people in the ad showed that they were also celebrating independence with a joyful feeling.

LH (20 Years) agreed with the previous informants, but with a slightly different perspective. LH found the ad interesting and engaging for Gen-Z but felt that the concept of independence wasn't fully captured. For her, "merdeka" meant different things for different people. It could also mean financial freedom or freedom from ignorance, for example.

MS (19 Years), the final informant, stated that the ad did not fully represent the meaning of "merdeka." Like LH, MS believed that the ad could not portray the true essence of independence simply through freedom of expression. MS argued that the ad was tailored for urban Gen-Z, but did not address the needs or views of Gen-Z from rural areas. Furthermore, the song's lyrics, such as "Merdeka Gen-Z ku, kamu lebih dari Z, kamu bebas dari huruf N," did not correlate well with the concept of independence.

c. Audience Categorization, based on the results of the interviews, it can be seen that each informant had a unique interpretation of the concept of independence in the Grab ad "Merdeka Melaju Dari A Sampai Z". According to Stuart Hall's reception analysis theory, there are three positions for audience interpretation: dominant hegemonic position, negotiated position, and oppositional position (Utami & Muthmainnah, 2024).

d. Dominant Hegemonic Position, this position refers to the audience fully accepting and agreeing with the message conveyed by the advertiser (Aripin et al., 2020). In this case, Informants 1 (RJ, 22 Years), 3 (ARP, 21 Years), and 4 (YI, 21 Years) accepted the concept of independence presented by Grab in the ad. All three shared the same perspective on the

message conveyed by Grab. This indicates that Grab successfully communicated the intended message to the audience as the advertiser hoped.

Grab released the ad "Merdeka Melaju Dari A Sampai Z" to celebrate Indonesia's Independence Day, with a concept aimed at Gen-Z. The ad presented independence differently by showcasing young people with various backgrounds who freely express themselves through a song sung by Refo and Fauna. Grab conveyed comfort for Gen-Z as passengers, and through the lyrics, it reminded young people in Indonesia of the value they possess, making it a meaningful form of independence for Gen-Z (Widiastuti & Syafiyah, 2023).

- e. Negotiated Position, negotiated position refers to when the audience interprets the message in a way that is continuously negotiated by both sides, where the audience understands the message but may interpret it based on their personal beliefs and background (Faturossyiddin & Hidayati, 2024). LH (20 Years) is an example of this position. While LH accepted the message conveyed by the advertiser, she also had her own opinion about the concept of independence. She acknowledged that the ad was appealing to Gen-Z but believed that the word "merdeka" could have different meanings for different individuals (Baskoro, 2024).
- f. Oppositional Position, oppositional position occurs when the audience rejects the message delivered by the media, interpreting it in a completely different way (Meilasari & Wahid, 2020). MS (19 Years), the fifth informant, demonstrated this position. MS disagreed with the message conveyed by Grab and felt that the ad was not representative of all Gen-Z, particularly those from rural areas. MS believed that the ad's portrayal of independence through freedom of expression did not capture the true essence of "merdeka."

In summary, the responses from the informants reflect a range of interpretations of the Grab ad "Merdeka Melaju Dari A Sampai Z." Informants in the dominant hegemonic position accepted the ad's message and saw it as an authentic representation of Gen-Z's values of freedom and self-expression. Informants in the negotiated position acknowledged the ad's relevance to Gen-Z but critiqued its narrow focus on freedom of expression as the sole definition of "merdeka." Finally, the informant in the oppositional position rejected the ad's portrayal of independence and felt that it did not adequately capture the diversity of Gen-Z or the true essence of the national concept of "merdeka."

This study contributes to the growing body of research on Gen-Z's engagement with digital advertising by showing how this generation interprets advertisements based on their unique perspectives on identity, freedom, and technological engagement. The results align with previous research suggesting that Gen-Z values authenticity, relatability, and convenience in ads, while also highlighting that their perceptions of concepts like "independence" are diverse and shaped by personal and social factors. Advertisers targeting Gen-Z must, therefore, consider the nuanced and multifaceted nature of this audience to craft messages that resonate across different segments of this generation.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that there were varying opinions among the informants regarding the interpretation of the Grab ad "Merdeka Melaju Dari A Sampai Z". As outlined, three categories of audience positions were observed: dominant hegemonic position, negotiated position, and oppositional position. These differences stemmed from varying backgrounds, relationships, and individual ways of thinking.

Three informants (RJ, ARP, and YI) were placed in the dominant hegemonic position, indicating that they fully accepted the message of independence in the ad. Informant 2 (LH) was categorized into the negotiated position, accepting the message but with her own interpretation. Lastly, informant 5 (MS) was in the oppositional position, completely rejecting the message conveyed by the ad.

The findings of this study have important implications for both marketing theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, it challenges traditional advertising models by highlighting that Gen-Z's perceptions of identity, independence, and technology are fluid and shaped by personal and social factors. This necessitates a shift in marketing theories to account for the diverse, multi-dimensional nature of Gen-Z's consumer behavior, moving away from one-size-fits-

all models. In practice, marketers must adopt more personalized and segmented approaches, recognizing that Gen-Z values authenticity, relatability, and convenience, but that these values are interpreted differently depending on individual and social influences. As a result, advertisers should prioritize hyper-targeted campaigns that cater to various Gen-Z segments, using platforms and formats tailored to their specific preferences. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for brands to build genuine, long-term relationships with Gen-Z by embracing values of transparency and social sensitivity, ensuring that campaigns reflect the diverse cultural and social backgrounds of this generation. Ultimately, to resonate with Gen-Z, marketers must craft messages that are authentic, relevant, and personalized, fostering a deeper connection with this nuanced audience.

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