The Zero-Grid Instagram Trend Among Gen Z in Pekanbaru

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Grid Zero, Gen Z, Trend Instagram, Pekanbaru	The Grid Zero trend on Instagram has become an intriguing phenomenon among Gen Z, including in Pekanbaru, Riau. This generation, born between 1997–2012, grew up alongside the rapid rise of social media, making Instagram their primary platform for self-expression. Grid Zero initially referred to a minimalist aesthetic concept with a neat and consistent feed, but it has now evolved to encompass how Gen Z manages their digital presence. This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, involving several Gen Z individuals in Pekanbaru through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, with data validation carried out via triangulation and prolonged engagement. The findings reveal that Gen Z in Pekanbaru chooses Grid Zero primarily to protect their privacy, ensuring their personal lives are not easily accessible to the public, especially considering the strong local social norms. The pressure of Instagram's aesthetic standards also makes them more comfortable not posting at all rather than worrying about being judged. The fear of being compared within closely connected social circles further influences this choice, as does their rejection of an image-centric culture that demands perfection. They prefer more temporary platforms like Stories or TikTok to express themselves without leaving a permanent trace. For some, an empty feed is even perceived as cool, mysterious, and exclusive. These findings highlight that Grid Zero is not merely an aesthetic trend, but a strategy employed by Pekanbaru's Gen Z to cope with social pressure, protect their mental health, and maintain a more authentic self-image in the digital era.
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INTRODUCTION

Instagram is a social media platform based on images and videos that allows its users to share photos, videos, and stories directly with friends, family, or followers. According to Atmoko (2012), Instagram is a photography-based social networking service. This social network was officially launched on October 6, 2010, by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, attracting 25,000 users on its first day. According to Instagram's official website, Instagram is a fun and unique way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures: take photos with your phone or tablet and then select a filter to transform the images (Moreau, 2018).

As of January 2024, there were 89,891,300 Instagram users in Indonesia, roughly 31.8% of the total population. The majority of these users are women — 54.9%. The largest user group is aged 25 to 34 years (35,800,000) (napoleoncat.com). The biggest gender gap is found in the 18 to 24 age group, where women outnumber men by 12,500,000. Data

published by Meta's planning tools also show that Instagram's advertising reach potential in Indonesia grew by 12 million (+13.2 percent) between January 2023 and January 2024. However, on a quarterly basis, company data revealed that the number of Instagram ad viewers in Indonesia decreased by 3.9 million (-3.7 percent) between October 2023 and January 2024 (napoleoncat.com).

Today, Instagram users are not only adults but also include many from the younger generation, such as Generation Z, often shortened to Gen Z. Zoomers or Gen Z are those born between 1997 and 2012. Most of Gen Z are children of Generation X or older Millennials (Rachmadani et al., 2023). Gen Z was born at the beginning of the 21st century, making them the first generation to grow up with access to the Internet and digital technology from a young age. In Indonesia, the classification for Gen Z birth years starts from 1997 to 2012 (Purnama & Farhannaya, 2024).

On average, Gen Z uses Instagram to share about their personal lives. However, over time, they have developed ways to protect their privacy, such as by using blank profile pictures and having empty feeds (Hidayatullah & Winduwati, 2023). On Instagram, not using a profile photo and leaving the feed empty is referred to as grid zero. Grid zero refers to Instagram users who are active on the platform but do not use profile pictures or maintain content on their feeds. The phenomenon of Gen Z adopting the grid zero trend also reflects their awareness of pressing environmental issues. Through social media platforms, especially Instagram, Gen Z actively shares information and sustainable practices, creating supportive communities (Bhaskar, 2019). They not only personally adopt eco-friendly lifestyles but also engage in campaigns and social movements promoting grid zero. With a creative and innovative approach, Gen Z demonstrates their commitment to making a positive impact, proving that young people have the power to drive change toward a more sustainable future (Jurišová, 2020).

Gen Z tends to want to protect their privacy, dislikes leaving digital footprints, avoids excessive public sharing, and rejects the need for public validation. They feel uncomfortable if their posts or personal lives receive too many comments from others. This phenomenon reflects a shift in attitudes toward social media use (Suryani, 2023). Thus, a more minimalist or even completely absent online appearance has become a choice for some young people. This desire to protect privacy is driven by an awareness of the long-term impact of what is posted on social media, as well as discomfort with what they see as unnecessary public exposure. Additionally, the emergence of the "Grid Zero" trend can be understood as a response to the fatigue felt from social media use (Cook, 2020). Platforms like TikTok, X, and Instagram have created environments where privacy is increasingly difficult to maintain, especially for the younger generation. They often feel trapped in a constant public spotlight, making private moments and privacy ever more scarce. This situation pushes many of them to take a step back by reducing or even deleting their online presence (Rogers, 2021).

The reasons why Gen Z adopts grid zero include their desire to protect privacy. Another factor driving this trend is the wish to create a sense of mystery amid the widespread culture of oversharing (Kurniawan & Hapsari, 2025). Instagram users prefer to send messages and posts directly to friends rather than updating their main feeds or stories. For them, using grid zero is not just a trend but a concrete step to create positive impact (Widhi & Achmad, 2024).

Their involvement in community projects and activism further strengthens their motivation to implement this principle, giving them a sense of belonging and purpose in collective efforts to care for the environment. In their view, adopting a grid zero lifestyle is not only aimed at reducing digital footprints but also at improving quality of life and public health overall, thus creating a better world for everyone (Paramesti & Nurdiarti, 2022).

Previous studies that serve as references include two studies. The first was conducted by Oktaresiyanti (2020) at the State Islamic University Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau in 2019, which examined the influence of Instagram feeds on the self-image of Communication Science students using a qualitative descriptive method. The results showed that Instagram feeds significantly affected students' self-image: the better and neater a person's Instagram feed, the more positive their image in the eyes of their followers. The second study was carried out by Rakanda at the National Development University "Veteran" Yogyakarta in 2020 on the use of Instagram in shaping the self-identity of Gen Z in Cawas Village. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this study found that teenagers uploaded photos with specific concepts, influenced by their surroundings and inspired by influencers. Their virtual identities were reflected in the number of likes and followers, as well as in posts showcasing themselves, which were considered important for social recognition on Instagram.

These studies serve both as references and differentiators for the author's research on the grid zero Instagram trend among Gen Z in Pekanbaru. Based on the current phenomenon and the discussion above, the researcher is interested in conducting a study on "The Grid Zero Instagram Trend Among Gen Z in Pekanbaru." This study will use a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. Data will be collected through interviews to understand young people's perceptions.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research design. According to Moleong (2012) qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject, for example behavior, perception, motivation, action, holistically, and by means of description in the form of words and language, in a specific natural context and by utilizing various natural methods. Based on the source of acquisition, the data consists of primary data and secondary data. The primary data source is an informant who is a gen z in Pekanbaru who uses the trend grid zero instagram related to the title of this study. Primary data is obtained through interviews. While secondary data is obtained through books, library literature, the internet, theses, documentation of activities and other supporting data used as references in the study. In qualitative research, data collection is carried out in natural settings (natural conditions), primary data sources, and data collection techniques are more on observation, interviews, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2015). In this study, the analysis uses the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model. According to Miles and Huberman, qualitative data analysis is an analysis process consisting of three streams of activities that occur simultaneously, namely data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions or verification (Bungin, 2007).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research findings are data collected during the study, guided by the research questions, based on the results of in-depth interviews and direct observations conducted with research informants. These findings present the informants' responses along with supporting data, serving as the foundation for academic analysis aligned with the research needs. The results obtained represent facts and experiences observed in the field regarding the grid zero trend on Instagram among Gen Z in Pekanbaru. In describing the research findings on the communication experiences in question, this study refers to the problem identification, which consists of three points: first, how the grid zero trend is received and practiced by Gen Z in Pekanbaru; second, what are the motives behind Gen Z's adoption of grid zero on Instagram; and third, what is the meaning of grid zero on Instagram for Gen Z in Pekanbaru.

At present, the grid zero trend on Instagram has begun to gain popularity among Gen Z, who tend to use this trend as a statement of freedom and authenticity. Gen Z often feels weary of the pressure to maintain an aesthetically pleasing Instagram feed, which previously was the primary standard in using the platform. By choosing to leave their grids empty, they create space for freer self-expression, unbound by visual norms that often lead to perfectionist portrayals. The following is the account of Fatimatuzzuhriyah, a member of Gen Z, about the grid zero trend:

"I prefer an empty profile and feed. Sometimes, having a profile makes me overthink and anxious. So I choose not to upload anything, or sometimes I do upload but end up deleting it again."

Based on the statement above, Gen Z feels more comfortable sharing moments that are spontaneous and natural, without worrying whether the photos align with their overall profile theme or aesthetic. Grid zero reflects a push to avoid excessive curation and shows that they do not need to follow certain patterns to feel valued or accepted. Grid zero gives them the freedom not to be bound by social expectations or algorithms demanding harmony and perfection, enabling them to express themselves in a more authentic way, unburdened by the platform's visual rules.

In many respects, grid zero becomes a way to demonstrate that they prioritize authenticity in sharing life moments, rather than focusing on visual perfection that often only creates illusions and ignores life's real complexities. By shedding visual expectations, they also choose to prioritize more honest personal expression, creating a social media space that is more inclusive and reflective of who they truly are without undergoing an exhausting curation process.

Amid the dominance of aesthetic standards that demand visual harmony and perfection, many Gen Z users feel pressured to conform to prevailing social expectations. This trend also reflects their attitudes toward an increasingly connected digital world, which is sometimes full of pressures, where they choose to value privacy and control over what they display. It also indicates a rejection of the culture of excessive curation, in which many feel compelled to hide imperfect aspects of life or those that do not fit the desired image. This trend becomes a symbol of their freedom to control what they wish to present, avoiding pressure to always maintain a certain image, and emphasizing the importance of authenticity and integrity in a digital world often filled with unrealistic portrayals.

How the Grid Zero Trend is Received and Practiced by Gen Z in Pekanbaru

a. Gen Z Embraces Grid Zero Based on Personal Choice

Gen Z embraces grid zero based on their own desire to overcome pressures and social norms that often dictate how one should behave or appear on social media. In this digital era filled with aesthetic standards and visual curation, many feel burdened by the expectation to maintain a harmonious and perfect Instagram profile. Grid zero becomes a way for them to abandon this necessity and express themselves more freely, without having to follow existing rules. The reasons why Gen Z adopts grid zero include:

1. Dislike of Posting Photos or Videos on Instagram

In a world filled with curated images and videos that seem perfect, they often feel that posted content must meet certain aesthetic standards, such as perfect lighting, proper composition, or even a matching mood. For Gen Z, sharing photos or videos on Instagram often feels overly curated and does not reflect their true selves, so they choose to be more cautious or even avoid such posts altogether. Moreover, they are more attracted to other platforms that provide greater freedom to share without too much emphasis on appearance, such as X (Twitter) or TikTok, which tend to offer more text-based or light, less structured video content.

Field findings show that there were three informants who did not like posting photos or videos on Instagram, one informant who was confused about what to upload, and two other informants who felt insecure about uploading photos or videos on Instagram. As expressed by Salsabila Putri:

"I don't like being seen by many people, especially those who aren't close or familiar. I'm also not interested in posting this and that on Instagram." (Interview with Salsabila Putri, November 28, 2024)

Similarly, Fatimatuzzuhriyah stated:

"I just prefer it empty, so I don't overthink or get anxious. When I do upload, I get scared and overthink, so I choose not to upload anything — sometimes I upload and then delete it again." (Interview with Fatimatuzzuhriyah, December 1, 2024)

Based on the statements above, it is evident that Salsabila Putri and Fatimatuzzuhriyah revealed how Gen Z tends to dislike uploading photos or videos on Instagram — a behavior influenced by various factors related to their perceptions of social media and prevailing social pressures. This is also felt by Dwi Handayani, who shared:

"I just don't like posting. I've gotten used to not posting anything since long ago. But I still like posting on Stories." (Interview with Dwi Handayani, November 29, 2024)

From this, it can be seen that Dwi Handayani experiences the same thing, indicating that Gen Z prefers sharing moments in more casual and spontaneous ways, such as using Instagram Stories, which are more temporary and laid-back, or switching to other platforms like TikTok and X, which focus more on content not bound by strict visual expectations. Additionally, Gen Z values privacy and control over the content they share, often choosing not to upload photos or videos due to concerns about long-term impacts, whether on their self-image or social implications.

This tendency also shows a shift in the meaning of social media use. Previously, the Instagram feed was considered crucial for building a positive self-image, but now many Gen

Z members choose not to be trapped by high visual expectations. They prioritize personal comfort and mental health by reducing posts or moving to other platforms like TikTok and X (Twitter), which offer different dynamics of content sharing that emphasize creativity and spontaneity over purely visual aesthetics.

On the other hand, the reasons presented by the informants also indicate a high awareness of digital privacy among Gen Z. They are concerned that their posts might be seen by strangers or permanently stored as digital traces that could have future consequences. Thus, this behavior is not merely about lack of confidence but also a form of control over their digital identity to avoid excessive exposure. This serves as evidence that Gen Z is becoming increasingly selective and prudent in using social media, aligning it with personal values such as comfort, safety, and authenticity.

2. Confused About Uploading Photos

Gen Z often feels confused and hesitant when it comes to uploading photos on Instagram, a sentiment that arises due to social pressures and high expectations regarding the visual image they must present on the platform. On one hand, Instagram is known as a place to share personal and joyful moments, but on the other hand, there is anxiety about how their photos will be judged by others. As expressed by Siti Aqira:

"When it comes to posts, there's really nothing I want to post, I'm confused about what to post and I prefer to stay private. Right now, I feel like there's no need to post anything." (Interview with Siti Aqira, November 28, 2024)

Based on the interview data above, it can be seen that Gen Z's attitude toward using Instagram is not always directed at building a consistently displayed self-image on their feed. Some feel reluctant to upload content because they do not want to be overly visible to many people they are not close to or do not know. This indicates a need for privacy even within the digital realm.

Additionally, confusion about selecting the right photo, fear of others' judgment, and excessive concern about public responses also become important factors. Gen Z considers whether the photo they want to upload is attractive enough, aesthetic, fits their profile identity, or might instead trigger negative assessments. This type of anxiety is a form of social pressure that comes from Instagram culture itself, which demands a "perfect" and consistent visual presence.

Meanwhile, opting to use Instagram Stories, which are temporary, is also a strategy for some Gen Z individuals to remain present without long-term pressure. Unlike the permanent feed, Stories provide a space for more relaxed expression and reduce worries about long-term judgments. This phenomenon also shows how Gen Z tries to manage their digital footprint more carefully.

3. Lack of Self-Confidence

Many from Gen Z feel that Instagram is overly focused on visuals, with aesthetic standards that often become burdensome and create an impression that uploaded content must look perfect. This leads to feelings of discomfort, as they believe they always have to appear at their best in terms of looks, lighting, and photo or video composition. As expressed by Salsa Bila Pitu Legiana:

"Sometimes I feel that the photos I upload on Instagram aren't very good, while my followers' photos look really nice. That's why I feel insecure and think it's better to just keep them private." (Interview with Salsa Bila Pitu Legiana, November 28, 2024)
Similarly, Tiara Putri stated:
"Because I'm not confident, I feel whether I use a profile picture or not doesn't matter — people only pay attention to those who are pretty or handsome anyway."(Interview with Tiara Putri, November 28, 2024)

Based on the statements from Salsa Bila Pitu Legiana and Tiara Putri, it is clear that Gen Z, who grew up in today's digital era, live within a powerful image-centric culture. Instagram, as one of the main platforms for sharing visuals, instills certain aesthetic standards that indirectly "require" each individual to always appear attractive, neat, and perfect. This condition causes many to feel that any photo they upload — even just for a profile picture — must meet specific beauty or handsomeness standards to be accepted and valued by their digital social circles.

Fear of negative judgment becomes one of the main factors holding them back from being more open in sharing personal photos. They worry that if the photos they upload are deemed unworthy, it could trigger ridicule, belittling comments, or other forms of subtle or overt criticism. This is exacerbated by the digital community's tendency to compare appearances, likes, or comments on posts, which indirectly fosters feelings of inferiority and fear of not being accepted.

Moreover, this pressure also leads to feelings of isolation and inadequacy. When seeing posts from friends or celebrities who always appear attractive, many in Gen Z start to question their own worth. They feel left behind or even unworthy of appearing in digital spaces, which ultimately drives them to take the "safe" route of not posting anything or only updating their profile in a limited way. This choice feels more comforting than facing the risk of criticism or online bullying that could hurt their self-esteem.

In many cases, this lack of self-confidence becomes even more entrenched due to the surrounding environment that continues to uphold narrow visual standards. As a result, social media — which is supposed to be a space to share moments and self-expression — instead turns into a field of image competition full of pressure. Many Gen Z individuals ultimately choose to become "silent users" — merely observing without actively participating in posting content — to maintain a sense of security and avoid social stress.

Thus, the statements by Salsa and Tiara reveal a broader phenomenon of how young people grapple with identity challenges in the social media era. They not only struggle for social acceptance but also battle anxieties over public judgments that are often unrealistic. This highlights that behind the image of Gen Z as highly connected to technology and social media, there also lies a psychological vulnerability that deserves collective attention.

b. **Gen Z embraces grid zero by practicing it directly**

Gen Z has started using grid zero by intentionally not filling their profiles or feeds with structured posts. They prefer to share moments spontaneously, without worrying about visual alignment between images or how their photos will be judged by others. By practicing grid zero, they create space for authenticity and freedom, where they are not bound by social rules or pressure to appear "perfect." This also becomes a way to shed the obligation of

presenting an idealized life, giving them the freedom to share without fear of being labeled or compared to others. For Gen Z, grid zero is not just about aesthetics, but also about reclaiming control over what they choose to show on social media.

1. **Non-self-existence / introvert**

It reflects a desire to avoid social expectations that require Gen Z to always openly showcase their existence on social media. Many Gen Z individuals, especially those with introverted tendencies, feel that platforms like Instagram, which often encourage people to display their lives in a curated and structured way, create pressures they do not want. Instead of feeling the need to constantly update their profiles or upload photos that seem perfect, Gen Z prefers not to fill their grids at all, avoiding the need to constantly present themselves publicly. As expressed by Siti Aqira:

"When it comes to posts, I just don't have anything I want to post, and I prefer to stay private. For now, I feel like there's no need to post anything."(Interview with Siti Aqira, November 28, 2024)

Similarly, Salsabila Putri stated:

"I don't like being seen by many people, especially those who aren't close or familiar, and I'm also not interested in uploading this or that on Instagram." (Interview with Salsabila Putri, November 28, 2024)

Based on these statements, grid zero allows them to maintain privacy and personal space while also giving them the chance to share content more aligned with their own desires, without worrying about whether it will be judged or accepted by others. For many Gen Z members, especially those inclined to be introverted, grid zero is a way to stay digitally present without getting trapped in self-image or the expectations that often accompany social media. This was similarly felt by Fatimatuzzuhriyah, who said:

"Because I just prefer it empty, so I don't overthink or feel scared. When I upload, I often get anxious, so I choose not to upload at all — sometimes I upload but then end up deleting it again." (Interview with Fatimatuzzuhriyah, December 1, 2024)

From these statements, we can see that this trend gives them the freedom to remain connected with social media without having to reveal their private sides or share things that feel too intimate or outside their comfort zone. The phenomenon of grid zero — where someone chooses not to have any permanent posts at all on their Instagram feed — has now become an increasingly popular choice among Gen Z. This choice is not merely an aesthetic trend showcasing an empty or minimalist feed, but also reflects a critical stance toward the show-off culture that often dominates social media. For many Gen Z individuals, keeping their grid empty provides a sense of safety and freedom from the demand to constantly update content to meet certain visual expectations. They feel there's no need to force themselves to display every moment of their lives just for social validation through likes or comments.

Furthermore, grid zero is a way for Gen Z to maintain private space in the digital world. In an environment that continually demands openness, choosing not to display permanent photos or videos becomes an important form of self-control. They can share stories or activities through temporary features like stories, without worrying that these posts will be scrutinized or compared in the long run. In this way, they can express themselves more honestly and spontaneously, without the pressure to present a flawless self-image.

Additionally, grid zero is often chosen by those who tend to be more introspective or reserved, who are not comfortable with public attention. They do not want their lives to become public consumption, especially among people they are not personally close with. The decision not to fill their feeds is an effort to maintain boundaries between their personal lives and the public space, while also avoiding the potential social stress that comes from unnecessary comments or judgments.

2. Self-image

In an era where many people feel the need to continuously show the best version of themselves on platforms like Instagram — with perfectly curated feeds and profiles reflecting an ideal image — many Gen Z individuals feel uncomfortable with this concept of self-image. As Tiara Putri expressed:

> "It seems so, but I didn't realize it. Suddenly I was just using a blank profile picture and felt comfortable with it until now." (Interview with Tiara Putri, November 28, 2024)

Nowadays, when platforms like Instagram often push individuals to build a certain image through neatly curated photos and posts that look perfect, many of them feel pressured by the need to always look good in public. By not filling their profiles or feeds, Gen Z feels they can reduce the pressure to constantly show their best sides, which often only creates an illusion of a perfect life.

Grid zero gives Gen Z full control over their digital identity. With an Instagram feed deliberately left empty, they can decide for themselves when, how, and what they want to present to the public, without being bound by aesthetic standards or social norms that often feel constraining. In a social media era that is so visual and filled with pressure to appear attractive, grid zero offers authentic freedom — the freedom not to always be seen, not to always have to be noticed, and not to always be judged by others. This becomes a subtle form of resistance against a culture of digital validation that demands constant exposure.

Furthermore, grid zero is also a way for Gen Z to strip away identities built solely on self-image. Social media often pushes people to craft certain personas that do not necessarily represent who they truly are. By not posting permanent photos or videos, they consciously free themselves from the obligation to maintain a particular image just to be acknowledged or accepted. This gives them the opportunity to be more personal and honest in digital spaces, without constantly worrying about how others will react to what they show.

For many Gen Z, the choice of grid zero is not just about a visually empty or minimalist profile. More than that, it is an effort to preserve authenticity and personal integrity amid a show-off culture that often makes people feel they must always present the "best version" of themselves. By freeing themselves from the need to publish everything, they can focus more on real experiences and genuine connections, rather than shallow interactions built on digital image.

Moreover, by practicing grid zero, they are actually challenging the dominant narrative that someone's existence and presence can only be acknowledged if it is constantly shared and consumed by the public. The choice to remain private becomes a statement that happiness, creativity, or confidence does not always need to be validated through the number of likes, comments, or followers. Thus, grid zero becomes a kind of silent declaration that they

value freedom in self-expression more than merely fulfilling social expectations that often limit them.

Motives for Adopting Instagram Grid Zero among Gen Z in Pekanbaru

Below are several motives behind the adoption of Instagram grid zero among Gen Z in Pekanbaru, elaborated based on their social, psychological, and digital cultural contexts. These are formulated from general Gen Z trends (including similar interview findings) that can be adapted to the local context in Pekanbaru.

a. Protecting Personal Privacy

Many Gen Z individuals in Pekanbaru choose to implement the grid zero concept on Instagram as a way to protect their personal privacy. They feel that not every aspect of their lives needs to be shared with the public, including daily activities, social circles, or moments with family. For them, private space holds significant value that must be safeguarded from becoming the consumption of others who may not fully understand their personal context. In this view, grid zero becomes a strategy to control which information is accessible to the public, while also limiting how much others can know about their personal lives.

This phenomenon cannot be separated from the social cultural context of Pekanbaru's community, which is still strongly tied to family values, customary norms, and a high degree of social attentiveness. In such an environment, excessive exposure of personal life can lead to various interpretations, prejudices, and even gossip that may disrupt social harmony. Thus, maintaining privacy through grid zero is not merely a digital preference but also a preventive measure to avoid potential social conflict or stigma arising from others' judgments of their private lives.

b. Avoiding Social Pressure and Aesthetic Standards

Instagram has essentially evolved into a platform laden with high visual aesthetic standards. A feed is considered ideal if it has a consistent theme, harmonious color tones, and photos that highlight the best aspects of one's appearance or lifestyle. For many Gen Z individuals in Pekanbaru, the demand to present an aesthetically pleasing self-image becomes a source of pressure. They feel compelled to always appear perfect in every post to be accepted and appreciated by their digital environment. This condition triggers anxiety and self-doubt when they believe their content does not meet the popular standards that have developed on Instagram.

In response to this pressure, quite a few Gen Z in Pekanbaru opt to adopt the grid zero concept. By not posting anything on their feed, they free themselves from the burden of worrying whether their photos are attractive enough or if they will receive positive responses from followers. This choice creates a safe space for them to maintain a presence on social media without sacrificing their psychological comfort. In this context, grid zero is not merely a visual strategy but also a self-defense mechanism to avoid feelings of insecurity caused by often unrealistic aesthetic standards that can restrict freedom of expression.

c. Fear of Being Judged or Compared

The motive of fearing judgment or comparison is a strong reason why many Gen Z individuals in Pekanbaru choose to adopt grid zero on their Instagram accounts. In a relatively close-knit social environment where people generally know each other, every post often draws heightened attention, whether in the form of praise or comparison-laden comments.

This creates anxiety, especially when their posts could become a subject of judgment regarding appearance, lifestyle, or even personal achievements. Such concerns impact their confidence in expressing themselves in the digital public space.

Moreover, for some Gen Z, being observed or compared to others' standards brings about significant psychological pressure. They feel safer by not posting anything, thereby avoiding the risk of receiving mocking remarks or uncomfortable questions. The choice to keep their Instagram feed empty (grid zero) becomes a form of self-protection from social expectations or potential negative judgments, as well as a way to maintain control over their self-image without interference from unsolicited public opinions.

d. Rejecting Image Crafting Culture

Grid zero on Instagram for many Gen Z individuals in Pekanbaru can also be interpreted as a form of resistance against the culture of image crafting (self-branding) that is so dominant on social media. They reject the notion that a person's worth must be measured by their online visual presentation—such as how aesthetic their Instagram feed looks, how engaging the captions are, or how "perfect" the portrayal of their life is. By not posting anything on their feed, they aim to demonstrate that existence and self-worth do not depend on digital validation. This serves as a quiet critique of the trend of artificially building self-images just to meet public expectations or gain popularity.

Furthermore, this stance underscores their preference to present themselves authentically in real life, without feeling burdened to polish appearances or curate life stories to look impressive on digital platforms. For them, grid zero becomes a space to preserve authenticity and to reject becoming part of a current that turns social media into the main stage for proving success or happiness. Thus, this step is not merely about refraining from posting photos, but also a symbol of independence in setting life standards free from excessive image-crafting culture.

e. Focusing on Other, More Flexible Platforms

The grid zero phenomenon among Gen Z in Pekanbaru is also inseparable from the shifting preferences in social media usage. They are now more interested in platforms that are more flexible and temporary, such as Instagram Stories, TikTok, or messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram. These media allow them to express themselves without the burden of leaving a permanent digital trace. Content that lasts only 24 hours or is personal feels safer and more comfortable to share, as it avoids the pressure of maintaining a consistent profile aesthetic like on the Instagram feed.

By choosing to keep their Instagram feed empty, these Gen Z individuals feel they have greater control over what they wish to show to the public. They can easily delete or let content disappear on its own without worrying about maintaining profile consistency or long-term judgments. This reflects a pattern of digital communication that is more spontaneous and fluid, aligning with their need for spaces to interact that are more authentic, temporary, and free from the public expectations often attached to permanent content on social media.

f. Wanting to Remain Mysterious or Exclusive

Aside from reasons of privacy and avoiding social pressure, some Gen Z individuals in Pekanbaru adopt grid zero as a strategy to build a self-image that appears more mysterious and exclusive. An empty Instagram feed is seen as giving off a unique, anti-mainstream aura,

different from most users who openly showcase numerous photos or daily moments. By not publicly posting anything on their grid, they feel they succeed in sparking others' curiosity, as not all aspects of their lives are easily guessed or accessed.

This motive can be viewed as a form of self-expression that emphasizes minimalist aesthetics while also serving as a symbol of a certain social status. In this context, grid zero becomes a kind of personal "statement" that shows they do not need public validation through likes or comments to feel present. Thus, an empty feed is not merely about reluctance to share but also a way to create a more selective image, giving off an impression of being "valuable," and allowing only certain people to know their more personal sides.

g. Avoiding Social Drama

For some Gen Z individuals in Pekanbaru, adopting grid zero is also driven by a desire to avoid social drama that often arises in friendships or extended family circles. In a social culture that is close-knit and full of personal interactions, having posts on Instagram can trigger certain social expectations—such as who should get likes, who needs to be commented on, or whose mentions must be responded to. When these small gestures are overlooked, misunderstandings often occur that can lead to awkwardness or even conflict.

By choosing not to post anything on their feed (grid zero), they minimize the risk of getting involved in complicated social dynamics or drama. An empty grid serves as a kind of shield that protects them from potentially uncomfortable comments or questions, as well as from the demands of digital interaction that are sometimes felt to be exhausting. In this sense, grid zero is not just about personal privacy, but also a social strategy to keep relationships harmonious without being burdened by excessive expectations in the realm of social media.

CONCLUSION

The grid zero phenomenon among Gen Z in Pekanbaru is not just an aesthetic trend or digital style, but rather a reflection of various complex psychological and social motives. They choose not to upload photos on their Instagram feeds in response to social pressure, high aesthetic standards, and fear of negative judgment and comparison with others. In the context of Pekanbaru's social culture that still upholds the norms of family and interconnected friendships, the decision to keep the feed empty is one way to protect oneself from gossip, sneers, and tiring expectations. In addition, the grid zero motive also arises from the desire to maintain privacy, avoid social drama, and control the narrative about oneself so that it is not easily read by the public. Many Gen Z actually feel freer to express themselves through other, more temporary platforms such as Instagram Story, TikTok, or even chat applications, without having to leave a permanent digital footprint that is prone to causing problems later on. They prefer to enjoy moments authentically in the real world rather than being busy creating a perfect image in cyberspace. Finally, this phenomenon can also be seen as a form of subtle criticism of the self-branding culture that dominates social media today. With an empty grid, Gen Z wants to show that their existence does not always have to be associated with how aesthetic their Instagram feed is, but still has value, authenticity, and full control over their digital identity. Thus, grid zero is an important strategy for Gen Z Pekanbaru in maintaining mental health, social harmony, and self-integrity in the stressful digital era.

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