

The False Facade (2024): A Sartrean Existentialist Analysis of Asha Qistina's Actions

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ABSTRACT

Character actions provide an important basis for examining how literary texts represent human experience, identity, and existential concerns. This study examines the actions, decisions, and responses of Asha Qistina, the protagonist of Farhah Dhamirah's *The False Facade* (2024), through four selected concepts of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism: bad faith, abandonment, anguish, and authenticity. Using Sartrean existentialism as its theoretical framework, the study employs qualitative textual analysis and theory-informed close reading to interpret selected passages that reveal changes in Asha's relationship with her constructed influencer identity, freedom, choice, and responsibility. The analysis shows that Asha initially relies on her influencer role to justify her choices and distance herself from responsibility, reflecting bad faith. As this identity becomes unstable, she is forced to choose without predetermined guidance or guaranteed outcomes, reflecting abandonment. Following the loss of her sister, her awareness of the consequences of her choices further reveals the burden of freedom and responsibility associated with anguish. Her eventual decision to disclose the truth, accept responsibility, reject her influencer identity, and delete her Glimmergram account represents a movement towards authenticity. The study demonstrates how the four concepts provide interconnected but analytically distinct lenses for interpreting Asha's actions and existential development. By applying Sartrean existentialism to a contemporary Malaysian novella, the study contributes to Malaysian literary scholarship on digital identity, online self-presentation, freedom, responsibility, and self-definition.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an important space through which individuals communicate, present themselves, and construct their identities in contemporary society. Beyond facilitating social interaction, digital platforms allow users to curate how they are perceived by others, while feedback from online audiences can further shape their understanding of themselves (Khaeriyah & Natsir, 2024; Pérez-Torres, 2024). However, the representation of personal identity on social media does not always correspond to an individual's lived reality. Users may selectively present desirable aspects of themselves, conceal negative experiences, and construct idealised personas that differ from their everyday identities (Nur Alfiah Tahir & Haerani Nur, 2025). This discrepancy between lived and performed identities highlights social media as a space in which individuals continuously negotiate who they are and how they wish to be perceived by others.

These tensions have also become significant subjects in contemporary literary representations of digital culture. Recent scholarship on contemporary fiction has examined how digital media is reflected in narrative forms and themes, particularly through representations of digital identity, authenticity, and performance in the online sphere (Taimur Khan et al. 2025). Literary texts that engage with social media and online identity therefore provide a space for examining the consequences of constructing the self in response to external expectations and public approval. Rather than treating digital identity merely as a technological phenomenon, such representations can be read as explorations of individuals' relationships with themselves and others, as well as the choices through which their identities are constructed and negotiated. This perspective is particularly relevant to fiction that places characters within environments shaped by visibility, judgement, and the pressure to maintain an acceptable public image.

These tensions are particularly evident in Farhah Dhamirah's *The False Facade* (2024), a supernatural thriller novella published by Bookiut. The novella centres on Asha Qistina, an influencer and social media personality whose carefully curated online persona differs significantly from her everyday identity. With more than a million followers, Asha has established a public image centred on beauty, books, and an idealised lifestyle, while concealing the extent to which this image is constructed for her audience. Her deception becomes increasingly consequential when the filters she uses during livestreams begin to manifest physically, blurring the boundary between her digital representation and lived reality.

Asha's significance to the narrative extends beyond her role as the protagonist of the supernatural conflict. Her carefully constructed online persona shapes the way she presents herself and interacts with others, while her actions reveal a growing dependence on the identity she has established as an influencer. She presents herself as an idealised figure to her followers, despite knowing that aspects of this persona are inconsistent with her lived identity. Her decision to promote products she barely uses, perform emotions for audience engagement, ignore her family while prioritising her online presence, and turn personal family conflicts into online content demonstrates how she repeatedly uses her influencer role to justify choices that she has nevertheless made herself. Rather than viewing these behaviours merely as acts of dishonesty, they can be examined as a tension between individual choice and the role through which Asha understands and justifies her actions. As the supernatural events progressively undermine the authority of this role, Asha is forced to confront the consequences of her choices and determine how she will act beyond the identity she has constructed for her audience.

This tension between self-definition, choice, and responsibility makes Sartrean existentialism a productive framework for examining Asha's character. Sartre's existentialism places freedom and responsibility at the centre of human existence, emphasising that individuals define themselves through the choices and projects they undertake rather than through a predetermined identity. This perspective is particularly relevant to Asha because her actions repeatedly reveal a tension between her freedom to choose and her tendency to justify those choices through the influencer role she has constructed. As the narrative progressively strips this role of its authority, Asha is forced to confront the consequences of choosing without certainty and to determine how she will define herself beyond the identity she has performed for her audience. Webber (2009) similarly approaches Sartre's philosophy as a theory of character, in which an individual's character is shaped through the projects and commitments they choose to pursue. Four selected concepts of Sartrean existentialism are particularly relevant to tracing Asha's existential development: bad faith, abandonment, anguish, and authenticity. Bad faith is evident in Asha's tendency to hide behind her influencer role and treat it as a justification for choices that she nevertheless makes herself. Her constructed persona allows her to avoid confronting responsibilities towards herself and her family. As the supernatural events progressively undermine the authority of this role, Asha enters a condition of abandonment, in which she can no longer rely on her online identity to determine how she should act and must make choices without any guarantee of their outcomes. This condition gives rise to anguish, particularly following Syahira's death, when Asha confronts the irreversibility of her past while recognising that she must continue to choose despite grief and uncertainty. Her eventual decision to livestream alone, disclose the truth about her online persona, and leave the influencer role behind can therefore be read as a movement towards authenticity, as she begins to assume responsibility for defining herself through her own choices.

Character, Action and Literary Analysis

The analysis of fictional characters has long been an important component of literary studies, particularly in understanding how characters contribute to narrative development, thematic construction, and the representation of human experience. Character analysis may consider a range of elements, including character traits, motivations, development, and actions, with these elements often working together to establish a character's role within a narrative (Jannidis, 2013). Studies have also demonstrated how specific character qualities and actions can be examined to reveal broader meanings within literary texts. For example, Yastanti et al. (2022) examine the main character in Jess Redman's *Quintessence* through ambition, while Sekarjadi et al. (2024) examine characterization through the protagonist's traits and development. These studies demonstrate that actions can provide important textual evidence for understanding fictional characters, particularly when actions are considered in relation to motivation and character development. Within existentialist literary criticism, actions can similarly be understood as expressions of a character's choices and responses to the circumstances in which

the character is situated. Mardiani et al. (2021), for instance, relate Emil Sinclair's experiences in *Demian* to Sartrean concepts of abandonment, anguish, and despair, while Nursoufiliani and Febrianty (2024) examine the protagonist of *Joseito* through freedom, individual existence, and responsibility. Taken together, these studies indicate that character actions can provide a productive basis for interpreting existential concerns. However, in the studies reviewed, actions are generally considered alongside broader characterization or as evidence supporting particular theoretical concepts rather than being systematically foregrounded as the principal analytical focus. This distinction provides a basis for examining how a character's actions across a narrative can be traced as expressions of changing relationships with choice, responsibility, self-deception, and self-definition

Sartrean Existentialism in Literary Studies

The application of Sartrean existentialism to literary texts has likewise produced a range of approaches, with scholars selecting different concepts according to the characters and texts under examination. De Visser (2015), for example, examines Damon Cross in Richard Wright's *The Outsider* through alienation, anguish, and freedom of choice, demonstrating how Sartrean concepts can illuminate a character's psychological and existential condition. Mardiani et al. (2021) similarly examine Emil Sinclair in *Demian* through abandonment, anguish, and despair. Other studies have approached literary characters through Sartrean accounts of intersubjectivity and modes of being. Goldareh and Amjad (2024), for instance, focus on being-for-itself and being-for-others in their analysis of *The Outsider*, while Khan and Yaseen (2024) employ being-in-itself and being-for-itself in their analysis of selected characters in *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. Nursoufiliani and Febrianty (2024), meanwhile, emphasise freedom, individual existence, and responsibility in their analysis of the protagonist in *Joseito*. These studies collectively demonstrate the flexibility of Sartrean existentialism as a framework for literary interpretation, particularly in explaining characters' relationships with freedom, existence, others, and responsibility. At the same time, the variation in concepts selected across these studies indicates that Sartrean literary analysis can be approached through different combinations of existential categories. Although bad faith appears in some of the scholarship, its analytical development is comparatively less prominent than concepts such as freedom, anguish, abandonment, despair, and Sartrean modes of being. The literature therefore provides a basis for further examining bad faith in conjunction with abandonment, anguish, and authenticity, particularly when these concepts are traced through a character's actions and development rather than considered only as isolated philosophical categories.

Existentialism and Sartrean Scholarship in Malaysia

The application of existentialist perspectives in Malaysian literary scholarship provides a further context for positioning the present study. Existing Malaysian research has approached existentialism through a range of literary and creative forms. Awang Sufi Udin and Zubir Idris (2021), for example, apply existentialist ideas to *Hikayat Kamarulzaman*, demonstrating the relevance of existentialism to the interpretation of Malay literary texts. Mas Rynna Wati Ahmad (2022) examines the existential crisis experienced by characters in Anuar Nor Arai's *Vacuum* through Sartrean concepts including facticity, anxiety, and despair. Dhanapal (2014), meanwhile, applies existentialism to K. S. Maniam's *The Return* by drawing on the philosophical ideas of Sartre, Heidegger, and Camus. Other Malaysian scholarship has examined existentialist concerns in indie literary works and song lyrics (Muhammad Atiullah Othman et al., 2022; Fauzi Naeim Mohamed, 2015). Taken together, these studies indicate that existentialism has been applied across different forms of Malaysian creative and literary texts, while the specific application of Sartrean existentialism varies in scope, conceptual emphasis, and textual focus. The literature reviewed therefore suggests that there remains room for further examination of contemporary Malaysian fiction through a more specifically defined Sartrean framework, particularly one that foregrounds the relationship between character actions, freedom, responsibility, and self-definition.

Synthesis of the Gap and Present Study

Taken together, the literature reviewed identifies three interconnected areas that provide a basis for the present study. First, although character actions have been examined in literary scholarship, they are commonly considered alongside characterization, motivation, or broader character development rather than systematically foregrounded as the principal analytical focus. Second, previous applications of Sartrean existentialism to

literary texts have employed different combinations of existential concepts, with comparatively less sustained attention given to bad faith in relation to other concepts such as abandonment, anguish, and authenticity. Third, although existentialist approaches have been applied to Malaysian literary and creative texts, the literature reviewed indicates relatively limited attention to contemporary Malaysian fiction through a specifically defined Sartrean framework. Against this background, the present study examines Asha Qistina's actions in Farhah Dhamirah's *The False Facade* (2024) through four selected concepts of Sartrean existentialism: bad faith, abandonment, anguish, and authenticity. By foregrounding Asha's actions across the development of the novella, the study seeks to trace how her choices and responses to the collapse of her constructed influencer identity can be interpreted as an existential movement from self-deception and externally defined identity towards greater responsibility, self-definition, and authenticity. The study contributes to Malaysian literary scholarship by extending the application of Sartrean existentialism to a contemporary Malaysian novella and by highlighting the interpretive value of examining character actions as expressions of existential choice and responsibility.

Sartrean Existentialism

This study adopts Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism as its primary theoretical framework to examine the actions of Asha Qistina in *The False Facade* (2024). Sartrean existentialism places individual existence, freedom, choice, and responsibility at the centre of human experience. Rather than understanding identity as something predetermined or fixed, Sartre's philosophy emphasises that individuals define themselves through the choices they make and the projects they pursue (Sartre, 2007). This understanding is particularly relevant to literary character analysis because a character's identity can be examined not only through descriptive traits but also through the choices and actions through which the character constructs and expresses the self. A central proposition in Sartrean existentialism is the principle that existence precedes essence. Individuals are not understood as possessing a predetermined essence that determines who they must become; instead, they define themselves through their choices and actions. Consequently, freedom is inseparable from responsibility, since individuals remain responsible for the choices through which they shape their lives (Sartre, 2007). Freedom in this sense does not simply refer to the ability to act without restriction, but to the individual's unavoidable involvement in choosing and assuming responsibility for those choices. The recognition of this freedom can also generate uncertainty and anguish because individuals cannot rely on a predetermined essence or external authority to determine their decisions. These principles provide the foundation for interpreting Asha's actions, particularly her attempts to define herself through an externally constructed influencer identity and her eventual confrontation with the consequences of her choices.

Webber (2009) provides a useful interpretation of Sartre's philosophy for character analysis by approaching Sartre's work as a theory of character. From this perspective, an individual's character is shaped through the projects and commitments that the individual chooses to pursue, while these choices are reflected in the individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Webber (2009) further situates character within a broader Sartrean account of freedom, bad faith, and authenticity. These interpretations are particularly useful for the present study because they enable Asha's character to be examined through what she repeatedly chooses to do rather than through her traits alone. Her actions, therefore, are treated as expressions of the projects, commitments, and self-understandings through which she constructs her identity. Sartrean existentialism consequently provides not only a philosophical account of human freedom and responsibility but also an interpretive basis for examining how Asha's actions reveal changes in her relationship with herself, others, and the identity she has constructed.

i. Bad Faith

The first concept employed in this study is bad faith, which refers to a form of self-deception through which an individual evades or denies the freedom and responsibility inherent in human existence (Sartre, 2007; Webber, 2009). Rather than openly acknowledging responsibility for one's choices, an individual may seek refuge in a predetermined role, social identity, or external expectation and treat it as though it determines who one is. In character analysis, bad faith can therefore be identified through actions that reveal an attempt to avoid responsibility by presenting one's identity or circumstances as fixed and beyond personal choice. This concept is particularly relevant to Asha because her influencer persona provides a role through which she justifies her

behaviour and distances herself from aspects of her lived identity. Her actions can consequently be examined for the extent to which she uses this constructed role to evade recognition of her own freedom and responsibility.

ii. Abandonment

The second concept is abandonment, which concerns the existential condition that follows from the absence of predetermined values or an external authority capable of determining an individual's choices. For Sartre, individuals are responsible for choosing how to live because there is no fixed external source that can ultimately make those choices for them (Sartre, 2007). Abandonment therefore does not simply mean being physically or emotionally abandoned by another person; rather, it refers to the individual's recognition of being responsible for choosing without guaranteed guidance. In analysing Asha, this concept is used to examine moments in which her previously constructed identity or external sources of certainty no longer provide a sufficient basis for deciding how she should act. Her actions in such circumstances can be interpreted in relation to her increasing awareness that she must choose for herself and assume responsibility for those choices.

iii. Anguish

The recognition of such responsibility is closely associated with anguish. In Sartrean existentialism, anguish arises from the individual's awareness that freedom entails responsibility for one's choices and that no predetermined certainty can guarantee the correctness of those choices (Sartre, 2007; Webber, 2009). Anguish is therefore not merely ordinary fear or sadness but an existential response to the weight of freedom and responsibility. As an analytical concept, it can be traced through actions and decisions that reveal a character's awareness of uncertainty, consequence, and personal responsibility. In Asha's case, anguish provides a lens for examining her responses when the consequences of her previous choices become unavoidable, particularly as she confronts loss, uncertainty, and the need to determine how she will proceed without relying on the identity she previously constructed.

iv. Authenticity

The fourth concept, authenticity, represents a movement away from the self-deception associated with bad faith. In a Sartrean context, authenticity involves acknowledging one's freedom and responsibility rather than allowing externally imposed roles or self-deceptions to determine one's identity (Webber, 2009). Authenticity should therefore not be understood simply as being honest with others or revealing one's private personality. Rather, it concerns the individual's willingness to assume responsibility for defining the self through freely chosen commitments. In analysing Asha, authenticity is used to examine actions through which she begins to acknowledge the constructed nature of her influencer identity, accepts responsibility for her choices, and makes decisions based on a more self-defined understanding of who she wishes to become. Her eventual rejection of the identity she has performed for her audience can therefore be interpreted as a movement towards greater existential authenticity.

Conceptual Relationship

The four concepts are treated in this study as interconnected analytical lenses rather than as isolated categories. Bad faith provides a basis for examining Asha's initial reliance on a constructed identity to evade or minimise responsibility for her choices. Abandonment becomes relevant when that identity can no longer provide certainty or direction, leaving her to confront the responsibility of choosing for herself. This recognition is associated with anguish, as Asha becomes increasingly aware of the consequences and uncertainty attached to her freedom. Finally, authenticity provides a lens for interpreting actions through which she begins to assume responsibility and define herself beyond the externally constructed identity. This conceptual relationship does not suggest that Sartre presents these four concepts as a fixed sequential model; rather, the sequence provides an analytical arrangement for tracing the development of Asha's actions throughout *The False Facade*.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs qualitative textual analysis to examine Asha Qistina's significant actions, decisions, and responses in Farhah Dhamirah's *The False Facade* (2024). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meanings embedded in literary language, narrative events, character behaviour, and textual responses rather than measuring variables quantitatively. The analysis is guided by Sartrean existentialism, with particular attention to four selected concepts: bad faith, abandonment, anguish, and authenticity. The study therefore combines close reading of the primary text with theory-informed interpretation to examine how Asha's actions, decisions, and responses can be understood in relation to freedom, choice, responsibility, and self-definition.

Textual data were selected from passages in *The False Facade* that directly demonstrate Asha Qistina's significant actions, decisions, responses, and changes in her relationship with her constructed influencer identity. The selected passages include instances of self-presentation, deception, decision-making, responses to conflict and loss, confrontation with consequences, and actions through which Asha either maintains or rejects her online persona. Passages were selected based on their relevance to the four Sartrean concepts employed in the study. For example, Asha's deliberate performance of an idealised online persona and her use of the influencer role to justify her behaviour provide textual evidence for examining bad faith, while her later decisions to act without certainty, confront the truth, and accept responsibility provide evidence for examining abandonment, anguish, and authenticity.

The analysis was conducted through a theory-informed close reading of the selected textual passages. First, passages containing significant actions, decisions, and responses by Asha Qistina were identified throughout the novella. Second, the selected passages were examined in relation to the narrative circumstances in which the actions occurred, including Asha's relationship with her online persona, her family, and other characters. Third, the actions and responses were interpreted using the four selected Sartrean concepts: bad faith, abandonment, anguish, and authenticity. Fourth, recurring patterns across the selected passages were compared to trace changes in Asha's relationship with freedom, choice, responsibility, and self-definition. Finally, the interpretations were synthesised to determine how Asha's actions and responses demonstrate a movement from reliance on a constructed identity towards greater acceptance of responsibility and self-definition.

The four Sartrean concepts served as the analytical categories for interpreting the selected textual data. The operationalisation of these concepts was based on their conceptual meanings established in the theoretical framework, as summarised in the following table.

Concept	Analytical focus
Bad faith	Actions through which Asha relies on her constructed influencer role to evade or minimise freedom and responsibility.
Abandonment	Decisions made when Asha can no longer rely on her constructed identity or external certainty and must choose for herself.
Anguish	Responses and decisions reflecting awareness of freedom, responsibility, uncertainty, loss, and consequences.

Authenticity	Actions through which Asha assumes responsibility and begins defining herself beyond her constructed influencer identity.
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ANALYSIS

i. Bad Faith

Asha Qistina's actions throughout *The False Facade* can be interpreted through Sartrean bad faith, particularly in the way she constructs and relies on her identity as an online beauty influencer. In Sartrean existentialism, bad faith involves evading one's freedom and responsibility by allowing an external role, identity, or circumstance to determine who one is and how one should act (Sartre, 2007). In Asha's case, her online persona gradually becomes more than a form of self-presentation. It becomes a means through which she understands herself, justifies her choices, and distances herself from the responsibility attached to those choices. Her actions therefore reveal not merely a tendency to deceive others, but a recurring pattern of self-deception in which the influencer role is treated as a necessity rather than a role that she has freely chosen to construct and maintain.

This pattern is first evident when Asha promotes Lorna Beauty during a livestream. She tells her followers:

"As you can see, I've received a package from Lorna Beauty, a local beauty brand, which has done wonders for my skin. Now, I'm actually quite shy when it comes to talking about my skin because I've struggled with it for a long time, but Lorna Beauty has saved my skin, and in a way, I want it to save your skin too." (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 12)

At this point, Asha presents herself as a sincere influencer who has personally benefited from the product and genuinely wishes to recommend it to her followers. However, the narration immediately contradicts this presentation:

"A lie. Asha had never applied the products from Lorna Beauty religiously; she had only tested them on camera twice to promote the product and receive her pay." (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 12)

The contrast between Asha's public statement and the narration of what she actually knows reveals that the promotion is a deliberate performance. Asha is aware that she has barely used the products, yet she chooses to present herself as a genuine user because doing so supports her role as an influencer. Her justification that promoting the product is "a part of her job" further allows her to treat the role as though it determines her behaviour. From a Sartrean perspective, this reflects bad faith because Asha distances herself from the responsibility attached to a choice that she has freely made. The influencer role becomes a means of disguising her decision to prioritise payment as a necessity of her profession.

A similar pattern appears in Asha's use of filters to construct and communicate emotions to her followers. During one livestream, she selects a filter that turns her face red and gives her devilish horns. The filter has a specific meaning among her followers, as Asha explains:

"I know I'm supposed to celebrate," she said, dropping her shoulders. "But there were so many mean comments today. They ruined Haha with Asha. Again, I hate using this filter..." I love this filter. She kept that thought to herself. "...but I'm not good with words, so it's the only way to make you guys understand that I'm truly angry." (Dhamirah, 2024, pp. 17–18)

The contrast between Asha's spoken statement, "I hate using this filter," and her private thought, "I love this filter," reveals the distinction between the identity she performs for her audience and her actual preference. She knowingly presents an emotion and attitude that differ from what she privately thinks. The filter therefore becomes part of the persona through which she manages how her followers perceive her. Her behaviour can be interpreted as bad faith because she allows the expectations attached to her online persona to determine how she presents herself, while concealing her actual thoughts from her audience. Rather than acknowledging the

freedom involved in constructing this persona, she treats the demands of her influencer identity as a reason for behaving in a particular way.

This performative behaviour becomes more deliberate when Asha responds to a hateful comment by pretending to cry during her livestream. The narration describes her performance:

“Asha fluttered her eyes and slightly lowered her head, her bangs curtaining her forehead. Her lips suddenly quivered, and slowly, hot springs poured out of her eyes. She covered her face with her hands, sniffing softly to complete her act of feigned sadness. Her chest rose and fell like the crescendos of a heart-wrenching ballad. ‘I’m sorry, everyone,’ she said, then quickly covered her phone’s camera and ended her livestream.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 18)

The narration that follows makes the purpose of this performance explicit:

“When she was sure she wasn’t recording anything, Asha burst into laughter. Faking a cry was another tactic she had mastered to foster more engagement and paint herself as the victim of social media.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 19)

The phrase “another tactic” indicates that Asha’s emotional display is not simply an impulsive reaction to the hateful comment. It is a deliberate strategy for generating engagement and constructing herself as a victim. The word “mastered” further suggests that this form of performance has become part of her established online behaviour. Asha is therefore conscious that the emotion she presents to her followers is constructed, yet she continues to perform it because it serves the identity she has created. Her behaviour demonstrates bad faith because she treats the expectations and demands of her influencer persona as a basis for her actions, rather than confronting the fact that she freely chooses to perform this identity.

Asha’s bad faith also extends to the way she justifies her influencer career to herself. The narration explicitly reveals the self-deception involved when she first discovers Glimmergram:

“When Asha had discovered Glimmergram, her first instinct had been to make up a new, likable persona and turn it into a money-making machine. She had lied to herself that she was doing it to ease her family’s burdens, when in fact, it was just a means to lessen her own.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 92)

This passage is particularly significant because the deception is directed towards Asha herself rather than solely towards her followers. The phrase “lied to herself” directly establishes the self-deceptive dimension of her behaviour. Asha convinces herself that her influencer career is primarily an act of responsibility towards her family, while the narration reveals that it also functions as a way of easing her own difficulties. She therefore constructs an explanation that makes her choices appear necessary or morally justified. From a Sartrean perspective, this reflects bad faith because she uses an apparently external responsibility to obscure her own freedom in choosing and maintaining the influencer identity.

The same tendency can be observed in Asha’s relationship with her family. During an online controversy, her mother, Roziah, asks her to put her phone down, but Asha remains absorbed in the accusations circulating online:

“Asha’s preoccupation with her phone instead of the delicious pizza in front of her. But Asha couldn’t. Accusations of plastic surgery were flooding the internet when she had never even considered doing one, and they stung her deeply. She didn’t mean to ignore her mother, but the voices around her had turned into background music and slowly muted themselves.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 36)

The narration presents Asha’s attention as something she “couldn’t” control, even though her continued engagement with the online controversy is connected to the identity she has constructed as an influencer. Her response can therefore be read as another instance of distancing herself from responsibility: the demands of her online identity become so dominant that she treats them as if they leave her with no alternative. A related pattern appears when Syahira asks why Asha does not promote their mother’s products. Asha does not directly answer her sister and instead internally explains:

“Asha dropped her phone on the table. It wasn’t that Roziah’s products weren’t good; she just received better pay and promotions from other entrepreneurs.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 37)

This statement reveals that Asha’s decision is ultimately based on her own priorities, particularly the financial benefits offered by other entrepreneurs. However, she does not openly acknowledge the decision as a personal choice when confronted by Syahira. Instead, the commercial logic of her influencer career becomes the justification for her decision. These scenes further demonstrate how Asha allows the role and demands of her online career to speak in place of her own responsibility.

The pattern becomes more consequential when Asha turns her conflict with Syahira into online content. During a livestream, she tells her followers:

“To be honest, I was... crying. A few hours ago, my sister and I had a fight, which ended with her saying that she planned to run away. She stormed out of our house, and I don’t know if she’ll come back. I know she will, because she can’t survive out there on her own. She’s only 15.” (Dhamirah, 2024, pp. 40–41)

The narration immediately reveals the motivation behind the story:

“In an instant, her livestream views hit 10,000. Her viewers were intrigued to know more about the story of Syahira. The story she had made up to get more engagement.” (Dhamirah, 2024, pp. 40–41)

Unlike the earlier examples involving product promotion and performative emotion, this action directly affects another person. Asha knowingly transforms a private family conflict into public entertainment and uses Syahira’s vulnerability to increase engagement. Her influencer identity provides the context in which the action can be treated as content creation, but the decision to fabricate the story remains her own. This therefore represents a more consequential form of bad faith, as Asha uses her constructed role not only to manage her own image but also to justify an action that harms another person.

Asha’s awareness of the distinction between her online persona and her lived identity becomes explicit later in the novella:

“But people don’t like the real me. They like the beautified, modified version of me.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 69)

This statement is significant because Asha recognises that the identity appreciated by her followers is not the same as her lived identity. However, this recognition does not immediately lead her to reject the constructed persona. Instead, she remains concerned with the version of herself that receives approval from her audience. The statement therefore captures a central contradiction in Asha’s bad faith: she is aware that her online identity is constructed, yet she continues to rely on that identity to determine how she presents herself and how she understands her value.

Taken together, Asha’s actions demonstrate that her bad faith is not limited to deceiving her followers. It is also reflected in her repeated use of the influencer role to disguise freely chosen decisions as necessities imposed by her online identity. Her promotion of products she barely uses, performative emotional displays, self-justification, neglect of family responsibilities, and exploitation of Syahira’s personal situation reveal different manifestations of the same pattern. In each case, Asha remains an agent who chooses how to act, yet she repeatedly allows the influencer persona to provide the justification for those choices. Her constructed identity consequently becomes a means of distancing herself from freedom and responsibility.

ii. Abandonment

In Sartrean existentialism, abandonment refers to the recognition that individuals have no predetermined external authority that can decide how they should live or guarantee the outcome of their choices (Sartre, 2007). In *The False Facade*, this condition becomes apparent when Asha’s constructed influencer identity can no longer provide the certainty that previously guided her actions. As her face begins to change unpredictably according to the filters she has used online, the identity she has carefully constructed becomes increasingly difficult to

maintain. Asha is therefore forced to make decisions without relying on the role that previously shaped her understanding of herself and her responsibilities. Her actions during this period demonstrate that abandonment does not mean that she literally has to face her problems without other people; rather, it means that the responsibility for choosing remains hers even when she seeks assistance or faces uncertain consequences.

The early stage of this condition appears when Asha decides not to attend a book launch because of the unpredictable changes to her face:

“Asha decided she couldn’t go to the book launch. It was too risky, and her face was always five minutes away from morphing into a monstrous creature. She had to go back home despite the storm.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 50)

This decision is significant because Asha can no longer rely on her influencer identity to determine her next course of action. Previously, maintaining her public image had provided a clear motivation for many of her choices. At this point, however, that identity has become a source of uncertainty rather than security. Her decision to return home is therefore not presented as a choice guaranteed to solve her problem. She simply recognises the risk and chooses the option she considers necessary under the circumstances. This reflects the Sartrean condition of abandonment because Asha must determine her course of action without an external authority that can guarantee that her decision will produce the desired outcome.

Asha’s interaction with Ellisa further demonstrates that abandonment does not require complete isolation from other people:

“Asha realised two things: Ellisa was the first person she had talked to about this, and she could really use a friend. Taking a deep breath, Asha offered, ‘Ellisa, do you want to hang out at my house?’” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 53)

Although Asha seeks help from Ellisa, the decision to do so remains her own. Ellisa may provide companionship and assistance, but she does not determine Asha’s choice or guarantee that the problem will be resolved. This distinction is important in relation to Sartre’s discussion of responsibility, in which seeking advice or assistance does not remove the individual’s responsibility for deciding what to do. Asha therefore remains responsible for choosing to seek Ellisa’s help.

The emergence of the doppelgänger intensifies this condition by making Asha’s previously concealed self-deception increasingly difficult to deny. After several days of experiencing unpredictable transformations, a black, tar-like substance emerges from her body and takes the form of a female figure resembling Asha (Dhamirah, 2024, pp. 75–76). The doppelgänger can be interpreted as a narrative externalisation of the contradictions embedded in Asha’s constructed identity. What previously existed as deception, performance, and concealed choices now takes a physical form that Asha cannot simply ignore or control through her online persona.

This conflict reaches a critical point when Asha learns that confronting the truth is necessary to weaken the doppelgänger:

“Confronting the truth meant saying goodbye to the story she had fabricated for her thousands of followers on Glimmergram. It meant shedding a layer of her defence mechanism, but she was ready to do it. If not for others, she would do it for herself. Asha smiled. ‘We have a plan, then.’” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 93)

This moment marks an important development in Asha’s condition of abandonment. She understands that confronting the truth may weaken the identity that has protected her, yet she chooses to proceed without knowing whether doing so will ultimately save her. The statement “If not for others, she would do it for herself” is particularly significant because it indicates that her decision is no longer primarily driven by the expectations of her audience. She chooses to act even though the outcome remains uncertain.

Asha’s confrontation with the doppelgänger further demonstrates this condition:

“Asha’s ears were ringing, but she could hear the sound of twigs and branches snapping. A branch fell to the ground. The doppelgänger was distracted, laughing at the thousands of hate comments on the livestream. Seizing the opportunity, Asha grabbed the fallen branch and stabbed the doppelgänger in the stomach. Black blood oozed out.” (Dhamirah, 2024, pp. 102–103)

Her action is significant because she chooses to act under highly uncertain circumstances. There is no assurance that attacking the doppelgänger will permanently stop it, restore her reputation, or protect the people around her. Nevertheless, she acts when the opportunity arises. Her subsequent attempt to reveal the truth further demonstrates her willingness to act against the identity she previously protected:

“My name is Asha Qistina. I don’t like pink, I don’t like rosy, dewy makeup, I don’t like studying for seven hours, and I don’t like everything heart-shaped,” Asha admitted, twisting the branch sideways. “I don’t like floral scents, I don’t like roses, and I hate being judged and slandered!” One last push. Asha yanked the phone from the doppelgänger’s hand and ended the livestream. Before she closed the Glimmergram app, a notification popped up saying her account had been suspended for a week.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 103)

The confession is important because Asha chooses to reveal aspects of herself that contradict the identity she has previously presented to her followers. However, the action does not produce a completely favourable outcome. Her account is suspended, and the confrontation is followed by the doppelgänger stabbing Syahira with a piece of wood (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 105). The consequences demonstrate that Asha’s decision to act does not guarantee the result she desires. Her attempt to confront the doppelgänger and reveal the truth therefore remains an act performed under uncertainty.

Taken together, Asha’s actions during this stage demonstrate the condition of abandonment through her increasing need to choose without relying on the authority of her constructed influencer identity. Her decision to return home, willingness to seek Ellisa’s help, choice to confront the truth, and eventual confrontation with the doppelgänger all involve decisions for which no guaranteed outcome is available. Importantly, abandonment does not mean that Asha acts entirely alone or refuses assistance from others. Rather, even when Ellisa and Syahira support her, Asha remains responsible for deciding how she responds to the situation. The failure of her plan to prevent Syahira’s death further reinforces the absence of guaranteed outcomes.

iii. Anguish

In Sartrean existentialism, anguish emerges from the awareness that individuals are free to choose and are therefore responsible for the choices they make, even when no certainty can guarantee the outcome of those choices (Sartre, 2007). In *The False Facade*, Asha’s experience of anguish becomes particularly evident after the death of her sister, Syahira. Unlike abandonment, which concerns Asha’s recognition that she must choose without predetermined guidance, anguish emerges when she becomes more fully aware of the weight and consequences of those choices. Syahira’s death forces Asha to confront the fact that the past cannot be changed and that she must continue making choices despite the loss, guilt, and uncertainty that follow.

Asha’s anguish first becomes apparent in her physical response after Syahira’s death. When her mother asks her to leave the grave, Asha struggles to move:

“Asha nodded, but her feet felt too heavy to lift her up. With a sigh, Asha rose and followed her mother.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 110)

Although the passage does not describe a decision involving a major external action, Asha’s physical response conveys the emotional weight of the situation. She is confronted with the reality that she cannot remain at the grave and must continue living despite the loss of her sister. Her eventual decision to stand and follow her mother therefore takes place against a condition in which the past cannot provide comfort or be restored.

This awareness becomes more explicit when Asha reflects on her relationship with Syahira:

“Asha wanted to turn back time and treat her sister better. She hadn’t been the best older sister, but she wanted to change that. She wanted to be better. But it was too late.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 110)

The phrase “But it was too late” is significant because it establishes the irreversibility of Asha’s past choices. She recognises that she could have acted differently towards Syahira, but the opportunity to make those particular choices again has disappeared. At the same time, her desire to “be better” indicates that her freedom has not disappeared with the loss. She can no longer change what happened to Syahira, but she remains responsible for deciding how she will live and act afterwards. The anguish therefore arises from the tension between these two conditions: Asha is unable to alter the past, yet she remains free and responsible in relation to the future.

This anguish becomes more visible when Asha prepares to livestream on Glimmergram for the final time. Rather than relying on Ellisa to manage her public image, Asha chooses to address her followers herself:

“Are you sure you want to do this alone?” Ellisa asked, waiting at the half-open door of Asha’s bedroom. ‘Positive,’ Asha confirmed, nodding her head.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 110)

The exchange is significant because Ellisa explicitly offers Asha the opportunity to reconsider her decision, yet Asha chooses to proceed alone. Her response, “Positive,” indicates that the decision is conscious rather than accidental or imposed by others. At this point, Asha understands that there is no guarantee that the livestream will restore her reputation or change how her followers perceive her. Nevertheless, she chooses to act and to take responsibility for presenting herself to her audience without relying on another person to manage the consequences.

Taken together, these moments demonstrate that Asha’s anguish emerges from the awareness that she cannot undo the past but remains responsible for the choices available to her in the present. Syahira’s death makes the consequences of Asha’s earlier actions irreversible, while her decision to livestream alone demonstrates that she cannot avoid making further choices simply because their outcomes are uncertain. Her anguish therefore lies not in grief alone, but in the existential awareness that she must continue defining herself after a loss that cannot be corrected.

iv. Authenticity

Authenticity in Sartrean existentialism involves recognising one’s freedom and assuming responsibility for defining oneself through one’s choices and actions rather than hiding behind predetermined roles or excuses (Sartre, 2007). In *The False Facade*, Asha’s movement towards authenticity becomes evident in her final livestream, during which she openly rejects the constructed identity that she has maintained throughout the narrative. Unlike her earlier livestreams, which were shaped by audience expectations, performance, and the desire for approval, this final livestream is presented as an act of self-disclosure and responsibility.

Asha begins the livestream by directly acknowledging that the identity she has presented on Glimmergram does not reflect who she actually is:

“Everything you know about me on Glimmergram is a lie—I don’t like studying, I don’t like wearing pink cardigans, I don’t like reading non-fiction books about psychology, and I don’t like everything matcha. I’m not soft-spoken at all. I’m the opposite, actually. I’m harsh and rude, and I often have negative thoughts about people.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 111)

This admission represents a significant departure from Asha’s earlier behaviour. Previously, she carefully constructed an identity based on characteristics that she believed would be attractive to her followers. In the final livestream, however, she deliberately dismantles that identity by revealing characteristics that contradict the persona she has created. Her statement is therefore not simply an admission that she has lied; it is an act of rejecting the identity that previously allowed her to gain approval from others. From a Sartrean perspective, this reflects a movement away from bad faith because Asha no longer attempts to conceal the distinction between her performed identity and her lived self.

Asha continues this process of self-disclosure by admitting the imperfections that she had previously concealed from her followers. She acknowledges that she does not have the flawless appearance presented on Glimmergram, that she has used filters to conceal imperfections, and that many of her posts were edited to create the impression that her life was perfect (Dhamirah, 2024, pp. 111–112). This admission directly challenges the basis of the online persona she has constructed. Rather than replacing one carefully managed identity with another, Asha exposes the processes through which the previous identity was created.

She also acknowledges the distinction between herself and the doppelgänger:

“The murderous rampage that happened is something I can never truly explain, because I don’t understand it myself.”

“It wasn’t me, though. Yes, I did kill the monster, but that doesn’t make me a murderer. I was only defending myself and other people. And yes, the soft, blushing girl you see on Glimmergram has the guts to take out a monster.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 113)

The statement demonstrates that Asha is no longer attempting to preserve the image of the “soft, blushing girl” for the approval of her followers. Instead, she accepts characteristics that contradict the persona she previously performed. Her admission also shows that authenticity does not require presenting herself as entirely positive or flawless. Rather, she acknowledges a more complex version of herself, including qualities that do not conform to the identity expected by her audience.

Asha’s movement towards authenticity is also reflected in her willingness to accept responsibility for the consequences surrounding the doppelgänger’s actions. During the livestream, she addresses the families affected by the deaths:

“Now, I urge the families of the victims to email me. I’d like to give you financial compensation to help you cope with your loss. I’m sorry. I never meant for any of this to happen, but I will try my best to help you. You can cancel me all you want, but please reach out to me if you were affected by this tragedy.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 113)

The significance of this statement lies in the fact that Asha does not condition her willingness to help on the restoration of her reputation. Her acknowledgement that people may “cancel” her indicates that she understands that her actions may continue to attract negative judgement. Nevertheless, she offers compensation and assistance to those affected. Her response therefore demonstrates an increasing willingness to accept the consequences surrounding her actions without making public approval the condition for doing so.

The clearest expression of this transformation occurs when Asha announces her decision to withdraw from the Glimmergram Awards:

“Lastly, I’m going to end this livestream by telling you guys that I finally know who I want to be. I want to be myself, and I don’t want to lie just to gain attention anymore. So yes, Glimmer fam, I’m withdrawing myself from the Glimmergram Awards, and this is me saying goodbye. Permanently. Again, I’m sorry for everything that’s happened, and I hope you can accept my apology. Good night.” (Dhamirah, 2024, pp. 113–114)

The statement “I want to be myself” directly contrasts with the identity that Asha previously constructed for her audience. More importantly, her decision to withdraw from the Glimmergram Awards demonstrates that her declaration is followed by action. She does not merely state that she wants to change; she takes a concrete step to distance herself from the role that had previously defined her. Her statement that she no longer wants to “lie just to gain attention” further indicates that she recognises the relationship between her previous behaviour and her desire for external validation.

This commitment becomes irreversible when Asha deletes her Glimmergram account:

“Asha ended the livestream and took a deep breath. She had made her decision. All she needed to do was hover her fingers over the screen. Swiftly, she tapped into the settings of her Glimmergram account and scrolled down. Asha closed her eyes, then clicked on ‘DELETE ACCOUNT’.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 114)

The act of deleting the account is significant because it removes the platform through which Asha had constructed and maintained her influencer identity. Unlike her earlier attempts to manage her online image, this action does not seek to improve her reputation or attract further engagement. Instead, she removes the source of external validation altogether. The decision therefore gives material form to her declaration that she no longer wants to lie for attention.

The narrative concludes this transformation with Asha’s reflection after deleting her account:

“With the account gone, Asha stared at the blank screen, wondering what to do next. She glanced at her reflection in the vanity mirror, and she finally looked like the girl she had always wanted to be.” (Dhamirah, 2024, p. 115)

The image of Asha looking at her reflection provides a contrast with the numerous filters and constructed images that previously mediated how she presented herself to others. The “blank screen” represents the removal of the digital persona through which she had previously defined herself, while the mirror directs her attention back towards herself rather than towards her audience. The statement that she “finally looked like the girl she had always wanted to be” can therefore be interpreted as the narrative’s representation of her movement towards a more self-determined identity. Importantly, this does not necessarily mean that Asha has discovered a fixed essence that existed independently of her choices. Rather, her final actions demonstrate that she has begun to define herself through conscious decisions and responsibility.

Taken together, Asha’s final actions demonstrate a significant movement away from the bad faith that characterised her earlier identity. She acknowledges the constructed nature of her online persona, reveals aspects of herself that she previously concealed, accepts responsibility for the consequences surrounding her actions, rejects the pursuit of external approval, withdraws from the influencer award, and ultimately deletes the account through which the persona was maintained. These actions suggest that authenticity in *The False Facade* is represented not as the discovery of an unchanging “true self”, but as an ongoing commitment to choices for which the individual must assume responsibility. Asha’s transformation therefore completes the existential development established across the previous sections: from relying on a constructed role in bad faith, through the uncertainty of abandonment and the burden of anguish, towards a greater willingness to define herself through conscious choice and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed Asha Qistina’s actions, decisions, and responses in *The False Facade* (2024) through four selected concepts of Sartrean existentialism: bad faith, abandonment, anguish, and authenticity. The analysis demonstrates that Asha’s existential conflict is closely connected to the constructed influencer identity through which she understands and presents herself. Her early actions reveal a pattern of bad faith, as she repeatedly relies on the influencer role to justify her choices and distance herself from responsibility. As this identity becomes increasingly unstable, she is forced to make decisions without the certainty previously provided by her online persona. Her confrontation with the consequences of these choices, particularly following Syahira’s death, further exposes the burden of freedom and responsibility associated with anguish.

The four concepts therefore illuminate different dimensions of Asha’s transformation rather than functioning simply as fixed stages of development. Bad faith explains her dependence on a constructed identity; abandonment highlights her need to choose without predetermined guidance or guaranteed outcomes; anguish captures her awareness of the consequences and responsibility attached to those choices; and authenticity emerges through her increasing willingness to define herself through conscious action. Her final decision to disclose the truth, accept responsibility, withdraw from the influencer role, and delete her Glimmergram account indicates a significant movement towards a more self-defined identity. Importantly, this movement does not

suggest the discovery of a fixed or predetermined “true self”, but rather an ongoing process of defining oneself through choice and responsibility.

This reading also suggests that *The False Facade* engages with digital identity beyond the issue of online deception. Asha’s constructed persona illustrates how digital self-presentation can become closely tied to external validation, social expectations, and an individual’s understanding of the self. Her eventual rejection of the persona demonstrates the existential tension between being defined through the expectations of others and assuming responsibility for defining oneself. Sartrean existentialism therefore provides a useful framework for interpreting the relationship between digital performance and self-definition in contemporary fiction.

By applying Sartrean existentialism to a contemporary Malaysian novella, this study contributes to literary discussions of digital identity by demonstrating how philosophical concepts of freedom, responsibility, self-deception, and authenticity can illuminate the representation of online self-presentation. Rather than presenting authenticity as a fixed state that Asha simply attains, the novella can be interpreted as depicting authenticity as an ongoing commitment to choices for which the individual must assume responsibility. In this sense, Asha’s transformation illustrates how contemporary fiction can use supernatural and digital elements to explore broader existential questions about identity, freedom, and the responsibility of defining oneself

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