

The effects of content overload, content irrelevance, and content intrusiveness in e-advertisements on lurking behavior through social media fatigue on TikTok

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Abstract

The escalating intensity of e-advertisements on TikTok raises concerns regarding social media fatigue and passive user behavior. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, this study examined the influence of content overload, content irrelevance, and content intrusiveness on lurking behavior, with social media fatigue as a mediator, among TikTok users in Indonesia. A quantitative causal design was employed, collecting data via structured questionnaires from 204 active TikTok users aged 17 and above. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results showed that content overload and content intrusiveness had a positive and significant effect on social media fatigue, whereas content irrelevance did not exert a significant effect. Social media fatigue was also found to have a positive and significant effect on lurking behavior, and fully mediated the effects of content overload and content intrusiveness on lurking behavior. Notably, content intrusiveness exerted a stronger effect on fatigue than content overload, indicating that ad format intrusiveness is a more potent trigger than mere volume in algorithmic short-form video environments. These findings extend the S-O-R framework to passive behavioral responses and highlight selective attention mechanisms for irrelevant ads. Digital marketers are advised to prioritize non-intrusive ad formats and implement frequency caps to mitigate lurking behavior among TikTok users.

Keywords:

content overload; content intrusiveness; social media fatigue; lurking behavior; TikTok

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INTRODUCTION

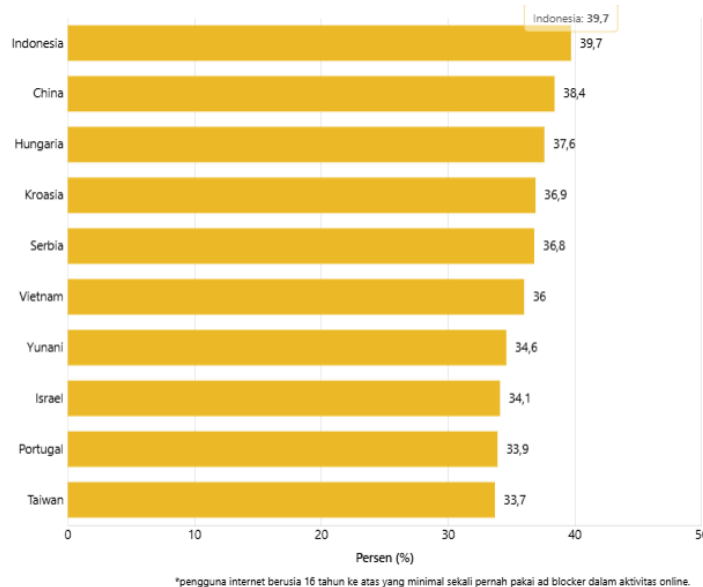
The introduction contains problem statement, research object, state of the art, research gap, contribution, and novelty. The rapid expansion of digital media over the past decade has fundamentally reshaped consumer

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communication landscapes. Among emerging platforms, TikTok has materialized as a highly disruptive phenomenon globally, not only in user acquisition but also in how it seamlessly integrates short-form video entertainment with commercial activities. As of July 2024, Indonesia recorded the highest number of TikTok users worldwide, reaching 157.6 million users and surpassing the United States (Celebian, 2024). Beyond entertainment, TikTok operates as an integrated commercial ecosystem, combining organic content with forced in-feed advertisements, TopView takeovers, affiliate yellow basket links, and Live Shopping broadcasts. Active Indonesian users spend an average of over 80 minutes daily on TikTok (Aprilaba, 2025), exposing them to an unceasing stream of commercial messages push-delivered by AI recommendation algorithms.

Figure 1.

Internet users who use an ad blocker at least once.



Source: Databoks (2024)

This massive exposure creates a severe behavioral paradox. Recent empirical data from We Are Social reveals that Indonesia ranks highest globally in ad blocker usage, with 39.7% of internet users actively blocking digital ads (Databoks, 2024). The primary motivations cited by users include excessive ad volume (64.4%), intrusive ad formats obstructing activities (55.2%), and irrelevance to personal interests (39.9%) (Databoks, 2024). This reality reflects the classical advertising wear-out theory (Krugman, 1900), which posits that repeated ad exposures gradually erode positive consumer responses and trigger irritation. In digital settings, heavy ad clutter exhausts cognitive resources, resulting in social media fatigue and passive withdrawal (Tayeb & Chebbi, 2024).

Although prior studies have investigated social media fatigue, notable literature gaps remain. Studies by Liu et al. (2024) and Qin et al. (2024) primarily focused on photo- and text-based platforms like WeChat, Facebook, and Instagram, which operate under friend-network structures rather than push-based, short-form video algorithms. Meanwhile, studies examining TikTok (e.g., Nareswari & Riyanta, 2025) were demographically restricted to localized urban samples and lacked an integrated theoretical model comparing the relative hierarchical potency of different ad quality stressors on passive behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, few studies explicitly employ the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to model how negative commercial stimuli drive passive, non-interactive withdrawal—known as lurking behavior—through psychological fatigue as a full mediator.

To address these empirical and methodological gaps (Miles, 2014), this study applies the S-O-R framework (Mehbarian, A. & Russell, 1974) to analyze the simultaneous impacts of content overload, content irrelevance, and content intrusiveness on lurking behavior, mediated by social media fatigue among TikTok users in Indonesia. Content overload reflects cognitive capacity overload caused by excessive ad volume (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024); content irrelevance denotes mismatch between ad content and user goals (Pang & Ruan, 2023); and content intrusiveness represents forced interruption of user activity (Bright et al., 2022). This study seeks to evaluate how these commercial stimuli influence users' internal psychological state (organism) and subsequent passive behavior (response), offering critical theoretical insights and actionable strategies for digital marketers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory

Explanation The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) asserts that environmental stimuli (S) influence individuals' internal cognitive and affective organismic states (O), which subsequently drive behavioral responses (R). In digital marketing contexts, commercial advertising attributes serve as external environmental stimuli, social media fatigue represents the internal psychological organismic state, and lurking behavior acts as the behavioral response (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024).

Content Overload and Social Media Fatigue

Content overload occurs when the volume of commercial promotional messages received exceeds an individual's cognitive processing capacity within a given time frame (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024; Qin et al., 2024). Grounded in Cognitive Load Theory, continuous exposure to dense advertising without adequate recovery intervals taxes working memory, generating cognitive strain and mental burnout (Lee et al., 2016; Whelan et

al., 2020). On TikTok's infinite scroll interface, excessive ad volume creates cognitive overload, directly increasing social media fatigue. Thus, the first hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Content overload has a positive and significant effect on social media fatigue among TikTok users in Indonesia.

Content Irrelevance and Social Media Fatigue

Content irrelevance refers to the perceived mismatch between displayed advertisements and users' personal interests, goals, or expectations (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024; Pang & Ruan, 2023). When presented with unwanted or unhelpful commercial messages, users must spend cognitive effort filtering out useless information (S. Zhang et al., 2016). Repeated exposure to irrelevant commercial messages has been shown to correlate positively with user frustration and psychological fatigue (Bright & Logan, 2018). Therefore, the second hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Content irrelevance has a positive and significant effect on social media fatigue among TikTok users in Indonesia.

Content Irrelevance and Social Media Fatigue

Content intrusiveness represents the degree to which an advertisement forcibly interrupts a user's media consumption flow and creates a perceived loss of digital autonomy (Bright et al., 2022; Segijn & van Ooijen, 2020). Forced-view formats such as unskippable TopView ads or sudden pop-ups disrupt users' escapism and goal-directed activities, triggering immediate irritation and psychological strain (Shareef et al., 2019); Tayeb & Chebbi, 2024). Accumulation of these forced interruptions elevates mental fatigue (Bright & Logan, 2018; Zheng & Ling, 2021). Thus, the third hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Content intrusiveness has a positive and significant effect on social media fatigue among TikTok users in Indonesia.

Social Media Fatigue and Lurking Behavior

Social media fatigue is a multidimensional psychological state characterized by cognitive exhaustion, emotional burnout, and reduced motivation to engage on social media (Qin et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). Lurking behavior refers to passive content consumption where users observe posts without actively participating through likes, comments, or shares (Hong et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). To preserve cognitive resources, fatigued users adopt lurking as an adaptive coping strategy, remaining on the platform passively rather than engaging actively (Cao & Sun, 2018; Dhir et al., 2018). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Social media fatigue has a positive and significant effect on lurking behavior among TikTok users in Indonesia.

The Mediating Role of Social Media Fatigue

Within the S-O-R framework, social media fatigue functions as the internal organismic state bridging external commercial stimuli and behavioral disengagement responses. External ad stressors (overload, irrelevance, and intrusiveness) do not directly transform users into passive lurkers; instead, they first induce internal mental exhaustion, which then leads users to adopt passive lurking as a defense mechanism (Cao & Sun, 2018; Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024; Whelan et al., 2020). Accordingly, the mediating hypotheses are formulated:

H5: Social media fatigue mediates the effect of content overload on lurking behavior among TikTok users in Indonesia.

H6: Social media fatigue mediates the effect of content irrelevance on lurking behavior among TikTok users in Indonesia.

H7: Social media fatigue mediates the effect of content intrusiveness on lurking behavior among TikTok users in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research This study employed a quantitative causal research design to test the direct and indirect structural relationships among variables. The target population comprised active TikTok users in Indonesia aged 17 years and above who spend more than 3 hours daily on the platform and have been exposed to e-advertisements on TikTok (such as in-feed ads, TopView takeovers, affiliate yellow basket links, or Live Shopping streams). Non-probability purposive sampling was used. Following marketing research standards for problem-solving studies (Malhotra, 2016), a sample target of 220 respondents was established. After rigorous screening, 204 valid and complete questionnaires were obtained for statistical analysis.

Primary data were gathered via structured online questionnaires distributed through personal direct messages on TikTok and digital survey links between April and May 2026. All measurement items were adapted from validated international literature and evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"). Content overload (X_1 , 4 items) was adapted from Fernandes and Oliveira (2024) and Qin et al. (2024); content irrelevance (X_2 , 4 items) from Fernandes and Oliveira (2024) and Pang & Ruan, (2023); content intrusiveness (X_3 , 4 items) from Bright et al. (2022) and Segijn and van Ooijen (2020); social media fatigue (Z , 4 items) from Zhang et al. (2021) and Qin et al. (2024); and lurking behavior (Y , 4 items) from Liu et al. (2024) and Hong et al. (2023). Pre-testing on 30 active users confirmed instrument validity ($r_{\text{corrected}} \geq 0.25$) and reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$).

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) executed via SmartPLS 4.0 software. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its superior power in evaluating complex causal-predictive models with mediating variables without imposing strict multivariate normality assumptions (Ghozali & Latan, 2015; Hair et al., 2022). Evaluation followed standard two-stage procedures: (1) Outer model measurement assessment (indicator outer loadings >0.70, AVE >0.50, Composite Reliability >0.70, HTMT ratios <0.85, VIF <5.0) and (2) Inner model structural assessment (R^2 , f^2 , SRMR, path coefficients, and 5,000-subsample bootstrapping for hypothesis testing).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Data Analysis

The sample of 204 valid respondents demonstrated demographic distributions consistent with active TikTok user profiles in Indonesia. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of respondents.

Table 1.

Description of Respondent Data

Information		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	38	18.63
	Female	166	81.37
Age Group	17 to 25 years	190	93.14
	26 to 35 years	14	6.86
Occupation	Student / University Student	165	80.88
	Private Employee	23	11.27
	High School Student	7	3.43
	Entrepreneur / Others	9	4.42
Domicile Island	Java	168	82.35
	Sumatra	20	9.80
	Other Islands (Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Bali, Papua, Riau)	16	7.85
Total		204	100.00

Note:

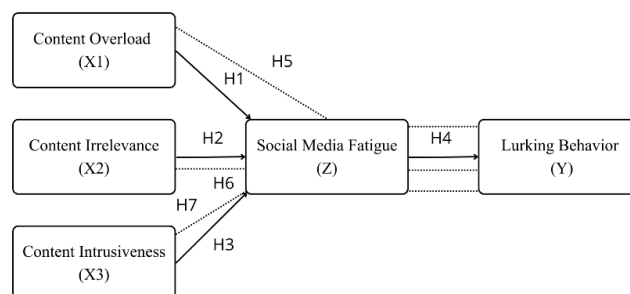
Source: Author(s) work

Descriptive analysis indicated overall agreement across variables: content overload ($M = 3.807$), content irrelevance ($M = 3.748$), content intrusiveness ($M = 3.727$), social media fatigue ($M = 3.663$), and lurking behavior ($M = 3.953$). Item $Y_{1,1}$ ("watching videos rather than reacting or commenting") yielded the highest mean score ($M = 4.152$), confirming that TikTok users are overwhelmingly passive consumers.

Measurement and Structural Model Assessment

Outer model evaluation confirmed robust psychometric properties. All indicator loading factors exceeded 0.70 (ranging from 0.717 to 0.864), except item $Y_{1,1}$ (0.663), which was retained because construct AVE (0.597) and Composite Reliability (0.856) met all standard requirements (Hair et al., 2022). AVE values across all constructs ranged from 0.564 to 0.644 (>0.50). Construct reliability was established with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.746 and 0.816 and Composite Reliability values between 0.837 and 0.879 (>0.70). Discriminant validity was fully established as all HTMT ratios were below 0.85 (maximum HTMT = 0.727 between X_3 and X_2). Multicollinearity was ruled out as all VIF values ranged between 1.295 and 1.847 (<5.0).

Figure 2.
Research Framework



Source: Authors work

Inner model evaluation yielded an estimated SRMR value of 0.089 (<0.10), indicating acceptable model fit. The model explained 34.3% of the variance in social media fatigue ($R^2 = 0.343$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.343$) and 12.1% of the variance in lurking behavior ($R^2 = 0.121$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.121$). Table 2 summarizes the path coefficients and hypothesis testing results obtained from 5,000-subsample bootstrapping.

Table 2.

Structural Model Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship / Structural Path	Path Coeff (β)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Effect Size (f^2)	Decision
H1	Content Overload $\rightarrow$ Social Media Fatigue	0.289	4.660	0.000	0.088	Supported
H2	Content Irrelevance $\rightarrow$ Social Media Fatigue	0.080	1.111	0.267	0.006	Not Supported
H3	Content Intrusiveness $\rightarrow$ Social Media Fatigue	0.328	3.911	0.000	0.092	Supported
H4	Social Media Fatigue $\rightarrow$ Lurking Behavior	0.355	5.400	0.000	0.144	Supported
H5	Content Overload $\rightarrow$ SMF $\rightarrow$ Lurking Behavior	0.102	3.304	0.001	-	Supported (Full)
H6	Content Irrelevance $\rightarrow$ SMF $\rightarrow$ Lurking Behavior	0.029	1.045	0.296	-	Not Supported
H7	Content Intrusiveness $\rightarrow$ SMF $\rightarrow$ Lurking Behavior	0.116	2.859	0.004	-	Supported (Full)

Source: Authors work from SmartPLS 4 bootstrapping (2026)

Discussion of findings

Effect of Content Overload on Social Media Fatigue (H1)

The empirical analysis confirmed that content overload has a positive and significant effect on social media fatigue ($\beta = 0.289$, $t = 4.660$, $p = 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.088$), supporting H1. Continuous exposure to high volumes of commercial advertising during short sessions exceeds users' working memory capacity, inducing cognitive fatigue (Lee et al., 2016; Whelan et al., 2020). On TikTok's infinite scroll feed, dense commercial posts deprive users of mental recovery periods, directly elevating psychological fatigue (Qin et al., 2024; Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024).

Effect of Content Irrelevance on Social Media Fatigue (H2)

Unexpectedly, content irrelevance showed no significant effect on social media fatigue ($\beta = 0.080$, $t = 1.111$, $p = 0.267$, $f^2 = 0.006$), rejecting H2. This finding can be explained by Selective Attention Theory and banner blindness (Nielsen Norman Group, 2024; Sapronov & Gorbunova, 2022). Young Gen-Z users (93.14% of sample) possess high digital literacy and execute rapid swipe gestures upon encountering irrelevant ads with minimal cognitive expenditure. Because filtering occurs at a pre-attentive processing stage, irrelevant ads do not accumulate sufficient cognitive strain to trigger psychological fatigue. This contrasts with findings on functional platforms like WeChat (Pang & Ruan, 2023), proving that algorithmically tailored

entertainment platforms neutralize irrelevance through highly engaging surrounding content (Segijn & van Ooijen, 2020).

Effect of Content Intrusiveness on Social Media Fatigue (H3)

Content intrusiveness demonstrated the strongest direct effect on social media fatigue ($\beta = 0.328$, $t = 3.911$, $p = 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.092$), supporting H3. Formats such as unskippable TopView ads and forced pop-ups forcibly interrupt users' escapism flow, causing perceived loss of autonomy and immediate goal impediment (Tayeb & Chebbi, 2024). Crucially, the finding that intrusiveness ($\beta = 0.328$) outweighs overload ($\beta = 0.289$) reveals a critical theoretical hierarchy: forced ad formats act as a more potent psychological stressor than mere ad volume in algorithmic short-form video environments.

Effect of Social Media Fatigue on Lurking Behavior (H4)

Social media fatigue exerted a strong, positive, and significant effect on lurking behavior ($\beta = 0.355$, $t = 5.400$, $p = 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.144$), supporting H4. When mental fatigue accumulates, users adopt passive lurking as an adaptive energy-preservation strategy (Hong et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). Rather than exiting TikTok entirely, fatigued users continue watching videos while withholding active participation (likes, comments, shares) to minimize further cognitive expenditure (Zhang et al., 2021).

The Mediating Role of Social Media Fatigue (H5, H6, H7)

Mediation analysis established full mediation for social media fatigue on the path from content overload to lurking behavior (H5: $\beta_{indirect} = 0.102$, $t = 3.304$, $p = 0.001$) and from content intrusiveness to lurking behavior (H7: $\beta_{indirect} = 0.116$, $t = 2.859$, $p = 0.004$). Commercial ad stressors do not directly force users into passivity; rather, they must first induce internal mental fatigue, which then manifests as passive lurking behavior. Path H6 was not mediated ($\beta_{indirect} = 0.029$, $p = 0.296$) due to the non-significant direct link between irrelevance and fatigue. These results fully validate the S-O-R chain ($S \rightarrow O \rightarrow R$), proving that internal organismic fatigue is an indispensable mechanism driving passive digital disengagement.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that e-advertisement stressors significantly drive lurking behavior among Indonesian TikTok users through social media fatigue as a full mediator. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the findings establish a clear hierarchy among commercial ad stressors: content intrusiveness ($\beta = 0.328$) is the most dominant driver of fatigue, followed by content overload ($\beta = 0.289$), while content irrelevance ($\beta = 0.080$) has no significant impact due to selective pre-attentive filtering. Social media fatigue in turn strongly increases lurking behavior ($\beta = 0.355$). Full mediation confirms that ad clutter and forced

interruptions do not directly cause passive lurking; instead, psychological fatigue serves as the essential organismic state driving passive user disengagement.

Theoretical implications include extending the S-O-R model to passive digital disengagement (withdrawal behavior) in short-form video environments, identifying boundary conditions regarding ad irrelevance, and proving that format forcedness exerts a stronger psychological toll than ad volume. Managerially, digital marketers and brand managers must move away from intrusive forced-view ads (such as rigid TopView takeovers) toward skippable, native, and creative storytelling formats. Marketers should also implement strict ad frequency capping to prevent cognitive overload. Platform developers are urged to incorporate proactive digital wellness tools, including intelligent screen-time reminders and ad exposure controls, to preserve active user engagement and sustain long-term platform health.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

Several research limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design restricts definitive conclusions regarding temporal causality over time. Second, data relied on self-reported questionnaires, which are subject to subjective reporting biases. Third, the sample was geographically concentrated in Java (82.35%) and demographically dominated by Gen-Z university students (93.14%), limiting generalizability to older user segments or other regions. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs manipulating ad formats, incorporate objective behavioral tracking logs (such as actual screen time and ad skip rates), evaluate additional psychological constructs (e.g., FOMO, privacy concerns, algorithmic transparency), and conduct comparative cross-platform analyses.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Juandri Pratama Pandiangan: Conceptualisation and Research Design, Data Collection, Methodology, Writing Entire Paper, Data Analysis, Layouting. **Rosa Prafitri Juniarti:** Conceptualisation, Methodology, Supervision, Editing and Reviewing. All Authors have read and approved the final version of the paper.

Declaration of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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