

Meme Marketing Content for Mitigating Social Media Fatigue and Enhancing Generation Z Purchase Intention

Fadhil Adiyatma¹, Ratih Amelia²

^{1,2}Digital Business / Faculty of Economics and Business, State University of Surabaya

*Corresponding Author

Email: fadhil.23212@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to evaluate how meme marketing content influences social media fatigue and subsequent purchase intentions among Generation Z TikTok users in Indonesia. Utilizing a quantitative approach within a causal research design, data were gathered via a web-based questionnaire from 137 sampled individuals aged 17 to 25. The empirical data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) within the SmartPLS software environment. The findings revealed that meme marketing content exerts a significant negative effect on social media fatigue ($\beta = -0.258, t = 3.832, p < 0.001$), indicating that humorous marketing material effectively mitigates users' cognitive exhaustion. Furthermore, meme marketing content demonstrated a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.459, t = 5.318, p < 0.001$). Conversely, social media fatigue showed neither a significant direct effect on purchase intention ($\beta = -0.120, t = 1.532, p = 0.126$) nor a significant mediating role between meme marketing content and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.031, t = 1.267, p = 0.205$). These findings suggest that meme marketing is an effective strategy to reduce digital fatigue while simultaneously driving purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers on TikTok.

Keywords: Meme Marketing, Social Media Fatigue, Purchase Intention, Generation Z, TikTok

INTRODUCTION

From a simple video sharing app, TikTok has transformed into a significant social commerce network. As reported by We Are Social (2025), Generation Z makes up the largest population group within TikTok, where users who fall under the age bracket of 18-24 years constitute more than 30% of the total user base of TikTok globally. The influence of TikTok as a social commerce application can be gauged from its emergence as the most downloaded application and second only in terms of overall usage time across the globe during September to November 2024, and at the same time stands tall as the fastest growing mobile app for consumer expenditure (We Are Social, 2025).

Brands inundating TikTok with advertisements have made Generation Z suffer from cognitive fatigue due to exposure repetition, also called Social Media Fatigue (SMF). According to Fernandes & Oliveira (2024), empirical validation indicates that the burden of branded content and advertising intrusion greatly influence SMF in younger generations. Consequently, SMF leads to lurking activities, where users only browse information without contributing anything. Tayeb et al. (2024) have empirically established that users' perception of advertising contributes greatly to increasing SMF, ultimately resulting in advertisement avoidance.

To address audience fatigue, marketers need strategies that avoid adding to users' cognitive load, making meme marketing a relevant solution. Meme marketing leverages rapidly spreading and highly engaging content shared in various formats including images, videos, and GIFs that employs humor and sarcasm to promote brand messages and increase customer engagement (Malodia et al., 2022). This approach operates across multiple dimensions including entertainment value, trendiness, informativeness, and the capacity to stimulate e-word of mouth, among other dimensions, all of which have been empirically shown to drive consumer engagement and purchase intention (Rathi & Jain, 2024). Unlike formal advertisements, meme-formatted content is argued to be processed as entertainment, reducing cognitive load and

persuasion resistance. However, how meme marketing mitigates social media fatigue and sustains purchase intention among young consumers remains theoretically underexplored.

Prior research confirms the effects of meme marketing on consumer engagement and purchase intention. Rathi & Jain (2024), in an empirical study among Indian social media users, found that meme marketing positively influences both consumer engagement and purchase intention, with consumer engagement serving as a partial mediator. In e-commerce contexts, Tsai & Hsiao (2025) further confirmed that meme marketing dimensions such as multiple cues and personal focus significantly drive purchase intention, though the effects varied across dimensions. Nevertheless, no research has been conducted to investigate social media fatigue as a potential mediator, making it difficult to establish if meme marketing has an impact on purchase intentions directly or via mitigating the effects of information overload. This research gap appears more critical in Indonesia, which has been ranked as the second largest TikTok community in the world with over 125 million users (We Are Social, 2025).

The theoretical basis of this study is grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) paradigm (Hochreiter et al., 2023), mapping meme marketing content as the stimulus, social media fatigue as the organismic reaction, and purchase intention as the final response. Meme marketing leverages promotional elements hidden inside entertaining media (Razzaq et al., 2024) to cultivate sincere connections with young consumer bases (Wiguna et al., 2024), yielding organic messaging that drives buying interest (Tsai & Hsiao, 2025).

Concurrently, social media fatigue (SMF) reflects a user's psychological withdrawal from social platforms when facing burnout (S. Zhang et al., 2021). It is fueled by cognitive resource depletion from information overload (Sheng et al., 2023) and disruptive commercial advertising (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024), which eventually leads to user avoidance (Tayeb et al., 2024). To eliminate potential theoretical conflation with purchase intention, this study evaluates SMF using only its cognitive and emotional aspects, sidelining the behavioral component. Grounded in the metrics of Spears & Singh (2004), purchase intention is defined as a consumer's propensity to purchase a specific brand (Kim, 2020; Kwakye et al., 2024). While positive digital user interactions reinforce this intention (Chusnaini et al., 2025), invasive marketing that triggers high SMF creates a psychological barrier that stifles the development of purchase intentions (Anastacia M. W. et al., 2025).

Meme marketing content is hypothesized to negatively influence SMF (H1): unlike intrusive branded content that accelerates SMF (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024), meme marketing's humor-based nature requires lower cognitive effort, avoiding the resource depletion that triggers fatigue (Sheng et al., 2023), as memes function as coping mechanisms providing escapism from daily pressures (Malodia et al., 2022). SMF is hypothesized to negatively influence purchase intention (H2), as cognitive depletion impairs decision-making capacity (Khusnah & Roosdhani, 2025), triggers ad avoidance (Tayeb et al., 2024), and undermines product evaluation ability (G. Zhang et al., 2023). Meme marketing is further hypothesized to positively influence purchase intention (H3), as its narrative transportation mechanism lowers defensive processing and generates favorable brand attitudes (Razzaq et al., 2024), resonating authentically with Generation Z (Wiguna et al., 2024) rather than operating coercively like conventional advertising (Razzaq et al., 2024), as empirically confirmed by Tsai & Hsiao (2025). Finally, SMF is hypothesized to negatively mediate the relationship between meme marketing and purchase intention (H4) within the SOR framework (Hochreiter et al., 2023). While Rathi & Jain (2024) demonstrated that consumer engagement mediates the relationship between meme marketing and purchase intention, the mediating role of SMF in this pathway has yet to be examined. This gap is notable given that SMF has been empirically confirmed as a mediator in related behavioral contexts, including platform switching intention among young social media users (Nguyen, 2025) and switching behavior in social commerce environments (Fan et al., 2024), suggesting its potential mediating role warrants empirical investigation.

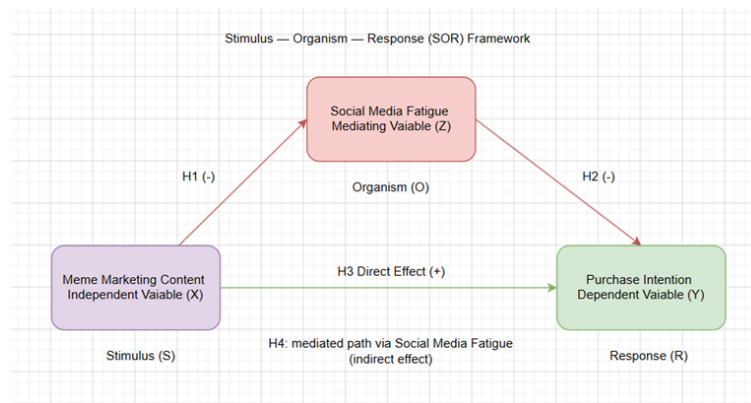


Image 1. Conceptual Framework

Driven by the emergence of this phenomenon and a noticeable gap in prior literature, this research aims to accomplish four primary objectives: (1) examine how meme marketing content affects social media fatigue, (2) assess the impact of social media fatigue on consumers' purchase intentions, (3) determine the direct relationship between meme marketing content and purchase intentions, and (4) evaluate whether social media fatigue serves as a mediating variable between meme marketing content and purchase intentions. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature by extending the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework. Specifically, it integrates social media fatigue as an organismic factor within the interaction dynamics between meme marketing and purchase intentions among Indonesian Generation Z TikTok users.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The current study takes a quantitative methodological approach using a causal design. Causal design examines the presence or absence of cause-and-effect relationships between two variables where “the goal of such designs is for researchers to be able to conclude that Variable X causes Variable Y” (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In line with the goals of the present study, which aims to investigate the causal relationship between Meme Marketing Content and Purchase Intention, through the mediator Social Media Fatigue in Gen-Z TikTok users in Indonesia.

Data were collected through a survey strategy, which is very popular in business research as it allows the researcher to collect quantitative data on many types of research questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this study, the survey was administered through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Form, enabling efficient data collection from a geographically dispersed population of Gen Z TikTok users across Indonesia.

Population and Sample

According to Sekaran & Bougie (2016), a study's population encompasses the complete set of individuals, occurrences, or objects that align with the researcher's investigative focus. For this research, the target population is defined as Indonesian Generation Z individuals aged 17–25 who utilize TikTok actively (at least three times weekly) and have encountered meme marketing content on the application. Given that the precise size of this demographic is unavailable, it is classified as an infinite population.

To select participants, a purposive sampling approach was adopted. As noted by Sekaran & Bougie (2016), this non-probability technique restricts sample selection to individuals who possess specific characteristics or meet predetermined criteria essential for providing the required

data. The inclusion criteria established for this study require participants to be: (1) between 17 and 25 years old, (2) residing in Indonesia, (3) active TikTok users who access the platform no less than three times a week, and (4) previously exposed to TikTok-based meme marketing. Regarding sample size, this study follows the guidelines suggested by Hair et al. (2022), which advise a minimum respondent count of five to ten times the total number of measurement indicators. Because this model utilizes 15 indicators across its constructs, a multiplier of eight was selected (15×8), resulting in a target sample size of 120 respondents.

Data Collection

The empirical data for this study consist of primary data, which denote information collected directly by the researcher to fulfill specific research goals (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). These data were gathered via a web-based Google Form survey distributed to a targeted sample of Indonesian Gen Z TikTok users who satisfied the inclusion criteria. The collection process remained active over a specific timeline until the minimum target of 120 valid responses was secured. The framework analyzes three core constructs: Meme Marketing Content as the predictor (X), Social Media Fatigue as the intervening mechanism (Z), and Purchase Intention as the outcome variable (Y). Measurement for each construct relied on a 5-point Likert scale, spanning from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Furthermore, each variable was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from established literature: Meme Marketing Content items were drawn from Rathi & Jain (2024), Social Media Fatigue from S. Zhang et al. (2021), and Purchase Intention from Spears & Singh (2004).

Data Analysis

To analyze the empirical data, this study utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) executed through the SmartPLS software. As detailed by Hair et al. (2022), the PLS-SEM analytical framework is divided into two distinct components: the measurement (outer) model and the structural (inner) model. Evaluation of the outer model involved examining both validity and reliability. Convergent validity was verified by inspecting outer loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE); the benchmarks required factor loadings to exceed 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022) and the AVE estimate to surpass 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

To confirm discriminant validity, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations was applied, where values strictly below 0.90 denote sufficient differentiation between constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). Additionally, construct reliability was substantiated using Composite Reliability (CR), adhering to a threshold of > 0.70 . Subsequently, the inner model was assessed to validate the proposed structural pathways.

The model's explanatory capacity was quantified using the coefficient of determination (R^2) (Hair et al., 2022). To test the hypotheses, a bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 subsamples was executed, where a critical value of $t > 1.96$ and a corresponding $p < 0.05$ signaled statistical significance (Hair et al., 2022). Finally, the intervening mechanism of Social Media Fatigue was evaluated by analyzing the specific indirect effects generated within the SmartPLS environment (Hair et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were collected from 137 respondents who met all screening criteria: Generation Z individuals aged 17–25 years, active TikTok users with a minimum usage frequency of three times per week, and those who had previously encountered meme-based promotional content on TikTok.

Result

Outer Model

Tabel 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Item	Loading	α	CR	AVE
Meme Marketing Content	Promotional memes on TikTok make me feel entertained when I see them.	0.885	0.880	0.912	0.675
	Promotional memes on TikTok depict situations I often encounter in my daily life.	0.817			
	Promotional meme content on TikTok usually follows currently popular trends.	0.763			
	In my opinion, the message in promotional memes on TikTok is delivered in a creative way.	0.849			
	I am motivated to share promotional meme content on TikTok with others.	0.788			
Social Media Fatigue	I feel overwhelmed by the large amount of promotional content that keeps appearing when using TikTok.	0.858	0.887	0.916	0.686
	I feel mentally exhausted due to excessive promotional content on TikTok.	0.835			
	I feel bored because the promotional content appearing on TikTok feels monotonous.	0.879			
	I feel my energy is drained when continuously exposed to promotional content on TikTok.	0.790			
	I feel my interest in promotional content on TikTok has decreased because it appears too frequently.	0.775			
Purchase Intention	I am interested in buying meme-promoted products.	0.789	0.869	0.905	0.656
	I have the desire to try products I see in meme content.	0.822			
	After seeing promotional memes on TikTok, I start thinking about buying the product.	0.813			
	I plan to buy products that are being advertised through memes on TikTok soon.	0.865			
	I plan to buy products that are being advertised through memes on TikTok soon.	0.758			

Source: Author's compilation

Table 1 shows that all indicators' outer loading values exceed 0.70, AVE values exceed 0.50, and Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceed 0.70 for all constructs.

Tabel 2. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Construct	MM	PI	SMF
Meme Marketing Content (MM)			
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.538	—	
Social Media Fatigue (SMF)	0.281	0.261	

Source: Author's compilation

Table 2 shows that all HTMT values are well below the 0.90 cut-off point, with the highest value noted for the association between Meme Marketing and Purchase Intention.

Inner Model

Tabel 3. Coefficient of Determination (R²)

Construct	R ²	R ² Adjusted
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.253	0.242
Social Media Fatigue (SMF)	0.066	0.060

Source: Author's compilation

Table 3 shows that the R² value of Social Media Fatigue is 0.066 and the R² value of Purchase Intention is 0.253.

Tabel 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T Statistics	P Values	Information
H1	MM → SMF	-0.258	3.832	0.000	Significant
H2	SMF → PI	-0.120	1.532	0.126	Not Significant
H3	MM → PI	0.459	5.318	0.000	Significant
H4	MM → SMF → PI	0.031	1.267	0.205	Not Mediating

Source: Author's compilation

Table 4 shows that H1 is supported ($\beta = -0.258$, $t = 3.832$, $p < 0.001$), H2 is not supported ($\beta = -0.120$, $t = 1.532$, $p = 0.126$), H3 is supported ($\beta = 0.459$, $t = 5.318$, $p < 0.001$), and H4 is not supported ($\beta = 0.031$, $t = 1.267$, $p = 0.205$).

Discussion

The Effect of Meme Marketing Content on Social Media Fatigue (H1)

According to Table 4, the content of meme marketing has a significantly negative effect on social media fatigue. It can be interpreted as generation Z TikTok users' increased exposure to meme marketing leads to reduced levels of cognitive and emotional exhaustion in comparison with branded posts. This outcome contradicts existing studies that empirically proved that content overload and intrusiveness in ads were crucial aspects influencing young people's social media fatigue (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024). Nevertheless, there is a crucial distinction between meme marketing content and branded material; the former type of content contains humorous and entertaining elements that produce positive affective responses that require fewer cognitive processes. In this context, according to findings, meme marketing content produces better attitudes towards branded content and increased intention to interact in comparison with conventional promotional images (Yang, 2022). Within the SOR model, this means that the mechanism leading to fatigue depends not only on content volume, but also on its structure and nature. Thus, meme marketing is viewed as a restorative stimuli that does not lead to any increase in cognitive exhaustion, but helps to alleviate it, which differs from existing branded content and explains their theoretical difference as a trigger for fatigue.

The Effect of Social Media Fatigue on Purchase Intention (H2)

Social Media Fatigue has no significant effect on Purchase Intention, since the path coefficient obtained is negative but insignificant, hence H2 is not accepted. Since the Gen Z is the true digital natives whose members have an inherent technological proficiency, it shows consistent high level of interaction with brand content regardless of the advertising fatigue experienced, implying that the concept of digital exhaustion does not directly result in curtailment of response mechanisms to consumption behaviors (Prachi et al., 2025). This characteristic is also observed in Gen Z's rapid adaptation to emerging platforms and content trends (Deepika & Massand, 2024). Besides adaptation, fatigue doesn't necessarily mean purchase avoidance; social media stress amongst Gen Z leads them to impulsively buy in order to cope with stress brought about by it (Purwaningdyah & Pratminingsih, 2024). Conversely, it is content related characteristics such as customization, ad qualities, and interaction that governs Purchase Intention within Gen Z (Deepika & Massand, 2025; Prachi et al., 2025).

The Effect of Meme Marketing Content on Purchase Intention (H3)

Based on the findings from the hypothesis testing, it can be concluded that the content used in meme marketing positively impacts purchase intention among Generation Z TikTok users in Indonesia; hence H3 is supported. The result is similar to Rathi & Jain (2024), whose study showed that meme marketing had a direct and positive influence on consumer purchase intention, where consumer engagement was a partial mediator. In line with the results, Lee et al. (2019) using the Value-Attitude-Behavior model proved that internet memes produced utilitarian and hedonic value, which developed positive consumer attitudes toward purchasing products. Further, according to Mukhopadhyay et al. (2023), meme value and trendiness contributed to enhancing the effect of meme marketing as they made brands more approachable, leading to purchase intentions. Consequently, based on the SOR model, meme marketing contents act as a powerful stimuli that create positive affective reactions among Generation Z TikTok users and lead to purchase intention as the outcome behavior.

The Mediating Role of Social Media Fatigue in the Relationship Between Meme Marketing Content and Purchase Intention (H4)

According to Table 4, the results of the mediation test show that Social Media Fatigue does not mediate the relationship between Meme Marketing Content and Purchase Intention, hence H4 is not accepted. From the SOR theory perspective, this result supports the phenomenon that not all psychological variables at the organism level act as effective mediators in a causal process; as identified by Zaenal & Latief (2026), perceived informativeness, although theoretically regarded as an intermediary variable at the organism level, did not prove as a mediator between social media content marketing and purchase intention. The highly significant direct path between meme marketing and purchase intention, which is consistent with findings by Rathi & Jain (2024), who verified that there exists a direct link between meme marketing practices and purchase intention, even in the presence of an intermediary factor, also indicates the persuasive influence of the entertaining characteristic of meme contents towards purchase decision-making. This is further supported by Fan et al. (2024) in their research showing how online fatigue influences platform switching and avoidance behavior in social commerce; hence, SMF acts more like an avoidance mechanism than a purchase suppression mechanism.

CONCLUSION

The current research demonstrates that the use of meme marketing content can be effective in addressing the issue of social media fatigue and increasing purchase intention in Generation Z consumers using TikTok in Indonesia. Meme marketing content has been shown to have a negative and significant impact on social media fatigue. Hence, humorous marketing

content with elements relevant to a consumer culture serves as a source of restoration, rather than adding to a cognitive load. While traditional intrusive advertisements may cause psychological fatigue due to repeated exposure, meme marketing content requires less cognitive effort and thus reduces rather than increases psychological fatigue. Social media fatigue, however, was found to have no significant influence on purchase Fatigue on the other hand did not significantly influence purchase intention for Generation Z users owing to their adaptation capabilities in digital fatigue scenarios whereby consumer response behavior is still robust despite digital fatigue. Fatigue in Generation Z does not serve to reduce the purchase motive but rather functions more as a strategy to withdraw from social platforms passively, as purchases are made on the basis of content and social influence. Notable in this respect is the positive and significant influence of meme marketing content on purchase intention which demonstrates that entertainment, trending and culturally sensitive memes have the power to instill positive attitudes towards brands and drive purchase intention among Generation Z. Narrative transportation strategy employed in meme marketing reduces persuasion resistance and affects emotional engagement allowing brands to interact authentically with their young consumer base. In addition to this, it was also observed that there is no significant mediation role played by social media fatigue in the link between meme marketing content and purchase intention, thereby indicating that meme marketing directly affects purchase intention via affective means without involving social media fatigue as a mediator variable. The high direct effect of meme marketing on purchase intention shows that entertaining memes can persuade consumers to make purchase intentions independent of reducing their level of fatigue. In light of this discussion, it can be concluded that the study results are highly important in terms of emphasizing the significance of meme marketing as an effective marketing content for Generation Z on TikTok.

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