

# Hate-Following in the Digital Age: Its Impact on Burnout Among Mass Media Students

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**Abstract** - The rise of digital media has significantly transformed the way audiences engage with online content, introducing new behavioral patterns such as "hate-following." Hate-following refers to the act of consuming content from creators or accounts that individuals dislike, often driven by curiosity, entertainment, or the desire to criticize. Despite the negative emotions associated with such content, users continue to engage with it, contributing to its visibility and success within algorithm-driven platforms.

Mass Media students, being active participants in digital environments, are frequently exposed to a wide range of content, including content that may provoke irritation or disagreement. This repeated exposure to emotionally triggering content may contribute to digital fatigue and burnout. Digital burnout is characterized by mental exhaustion, reduced motivation, and emotional strain caused by excessive or negative digital consumption.

This study aims to explore the relationship between hate-following behavior and digital burnout among Mass Media students. It seeks to understand the motivations behind hate-following and examine whether engaging with disliked content has a measurable impact on emotional well-being.

By analyzing patterns of engagement and emotional responses, the research attempts to highlight the paradox of users voluntarily interacting with content that negatively affects them.

The findings of this study are expected to provide insights into contemporary digital consumption habits and contribute to a better understanding of how negative engagement patterns influence mental health and media behavior. The study is based on a quantitative survey conducted among 70 Mass Media students using a structured questionnaire.

**Key Words:** Hate-following, Digital Burnout, Social Media Engagement, Negative Content Consumption, Attention Economy, Algorithmic Influence, Media Behavior, Emotional Well-being, Mass Media Students, Digital Fatigue

## 1.INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital media has significantly transformed the way individuals consume and interact with content. Social media platforms have become central to everyday communication, entertainment, and information sharing, especially among younger audiences.

One such emerging behavior is "hate-following," where individuals continue to follow and engage with content from creators or accounts, they dislike. Unlike traditional media consumption, where audiences actively avoid unfavorable content, digital platforms encourage continuous interaction, even with content that provokes negative emotions. Users may engage in hate-following due to curiosity, entertainment, peer influence, or the desire to criticize, making it a complex and paradoxical form of engagement.

The structure of social media platforms plays a crucial role in reinforcing such behavior. Features like infinite scrolling, autoplay, and algorithmic recommendations ensure that users remain engaged for extended periods. Content that generates strong emotional reactions, including anger or frustration, is often prioritized, leading to repeated exposure to similar content. This creates a cycle where users unintentionally consume more of the content they claim to dislike, contributing to its visibility and success.

At the same time, excessive and emotionally intense digital engagement has been linked to digital burnout. Digital burnout refers to a state of mental exhaustion, reduced concentration, and emotional fatigue resulting from prolonged use of digital platforms. Continuous exposure to negative or overwhelming content can intensify these effects, particularly among students who are already managing academic and social pressures.

Mass Media students, who are deeply immersed in digital environments and media trends, are especially relevant to this study. Their constant interaction with online content, combined with their awareness of media dynamics, makes them an ideal group to examine the relationship between hate-following and digital burnout. Understanding this relationship is essential in analyzing how modern media consumption patterns influence emotional well-being and cognitive engagement.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the correlation between hate-following and digital burnout among Mass Media students, with a focus on understanding the motivations behind such behavior and its impact on mental health in the digital age.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Emergence of Hate-Following in Digital Culture

The evolution of social media has introduced new forms of audience engagement, including behaviors driven by negative emotions. Hate-following refers to the act of following or consuming content from individuals or pages that users dislike. This behavior is often fueled by curiosity, disagreement, or entertainment derived from criticism. According to Henry Jenkins (2006), audiences in participatory culture are not passive consumers but active participants who engage with media in multiple ways, including opposition. This reflects a shift where user interaction is not limited to positive responses but also includes negative engagement within digital environments.

### 2. The Attention Economy and Negative Engagement

The concept of the attention economy highlights that human attention is a limited resource in a digital environment overloaded with content. Scholars like Herbert A. Simon (1971) argued that an abundance of information leads to a scarcity of attention. In such an environment, content that provokes strong emotional reactions, such as anger or irritation—is more likely to capture and retain attention. Hate-following becomes a

byproduct of this system, as users are drawn to emotionally stimulating content. Algorithm-driven platforms further amplify this behavior by promoting content that generates high engagement, regardless of whether the reaction is positive or negative.

### 3. Algorithmic Influence and Reinforcement of Behavior

Modern digital platforms rely heavily on algorithms that personalize content based on user interactions and engagement patterns. According to Shoshana Zuboff (2019), digital platforms operate through surveillance capitalism, where user behavior is continuously tracked to predict and influence future actions. When users engage with content they dislike, algorithms interpret this interaction as interest and continue to promote similar content. Additionally, Adam Alter (2017) explains that digital platforms are designed to encourage habitual usage through reward-based mechanisms such as likes, comments, and continuous scrolling. This creates a feedback loop where hate-following becomes normalized. Over time, such reinforcement reduces users' control over their media consumption and increases exposure to emotionally triggering content.

### 4. Emotional Responses and Digital Burnout

Digital burnout refers to a state of mental exhaustion and emotional fatigue caused by prolonged exposure to digital media. According to Gloria Mark (2015), constant interaction with digital content reduces attention span and increases cognitive overload, leading to stress and decreased productivity. Similarly, Larry D. Rosen (2012) highlights that excessive media consumption and multitasking behaviors can negatively impact mental well-being. Hate-following, which involves repeated exposure to frustrating or anger-inducing content, can intensify these effects by creating continuous emotional strain. Over time, such patterns may lead to irritability, reduced motivation, and difficulty concentrating, thereby contributing significantly to digital burnout among frequent social media users, especially students.

### 5. Changing Media Consumption Patterns Among Students

Younger audiences, especially students, are highly engaged with digital platforms and are more susceptible to evolving media consumption patterns. According to

Henry Jenkins (2006), participatory culture has transformed audiences into active contributors in media environments. Mass Media students, in particular, are constantly exposed to trends, influencers, and online discourse, increasing their likelihood of engaging in behaviors like hate-following. This continuous exposure, combined with academic and digital pressures, may contribute to higher levels of digital burnout. The normalization of engaging with both positive and negative content reflects a shift in how audiences interact with media in the digital age.

### 6. Negative Engagement and Emotional Stimulation

Recent research suggests that digital audiences are often drawn to content that evokes strong emotional reactions, including anger and frustration. According to Herbert A. Simon (1971), an abundance of information creates competition for attention, making emotionally charged content more effective in capturing user interest. Additionally, Gloria Mark (2015) highlights that constant interaction with stimulating digital content can increase stress levels and reduce sustained attention. This leads to a pattern where users repeatedly engage with content they dislike, reinforcing hate following behavior. Over time, such exposure can contribute to emotional fatigue, reduced focus, and symptoms of digital burnout among frequent social media users.

### METHODOLOGY

In this research, a quantitative research design is used to examine the relationship between hate following and digital burnout among Mass Media students. The study focuses on understanding patterns of engagement with disliked content and its impact on emotional well-being. A structured online questionnaire is used as the primary tool for data collection.

The questionnaire consists of close-ended questions, including multiple-choice and Likert scale formats, to ensure consistency and ease of analysis. It is designed to gather information about participants' social media usage, frequency of hate-following, emotional responses, and experiences related to digital fatigue and stress.

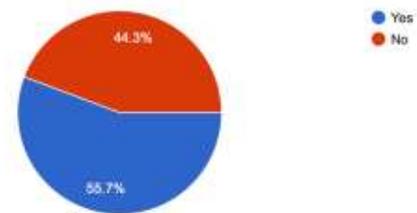
A sample of 70 Mass Media students is selected using convenience sampling, as this group is highly active on digital platforms and relevant to the study. The survey is distributed online to ensure accessibility and a wider reach. Participants are informed about the purpose of the

research, and their responses are kept confidential to maintain ethical standards.

The collected data is analyzed using percentage analysis to identify patterns and correlations. The findings are represented through charts and graphs, allowing for a clear understanding of how hate following behavior contributes to digital burnout among students.

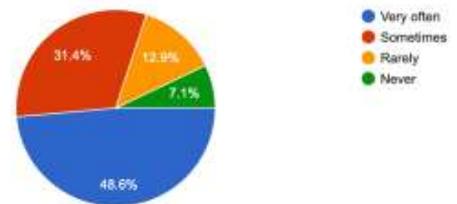
Do you follow any creators/influencers/accounts that you dislike or disagree with?

70 responses



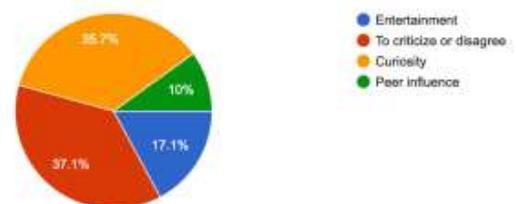
If yes, how often do you engage with their content (view, like, comment, share)?

70 responses



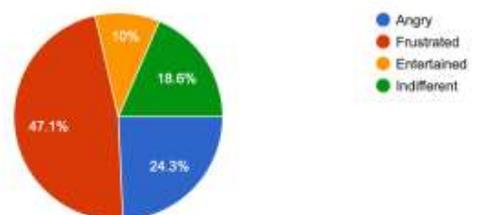
What is your main reason for following such accounts?

70 responses



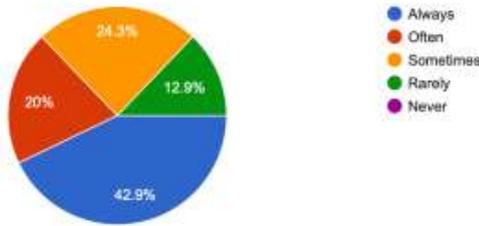
How do you usually feel after consuming content from accounts you dislike?

70 responses



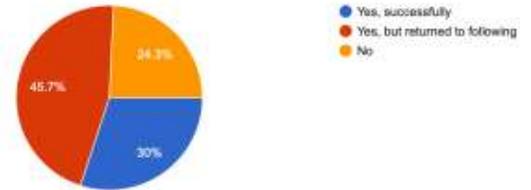
**How frequently do you feel mentally exhausted after using social media?**

70 responses



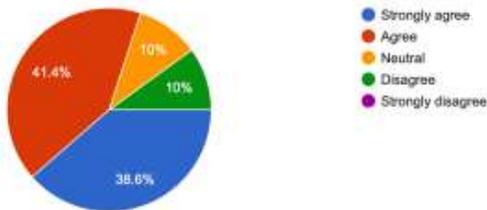
**Have you ever tried to unfollow or avoid such accounts to protect your mental well-being?**

70 responses



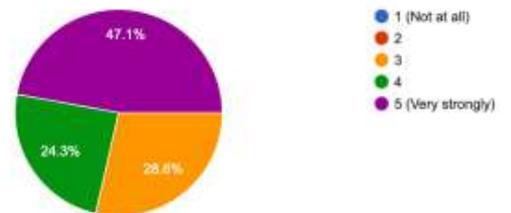
**Do you think engaging with content you dislike contributes to your stress or irritation?**

70 responses



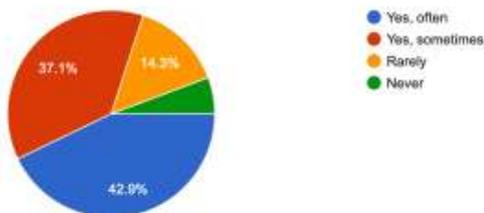
**On a scale of 1–5, how strongly do you think "hate-following" contributes to digital burnout among students?**

70 responses



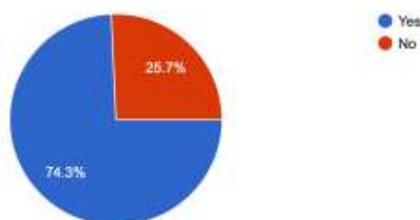
**Have you ever continued watching content even when it negatively affected your mood?**

70 responses



**Are you aware that interacting with such content increases its visibility and benefits the creator financially or algorithmically?**

70 responses



**FINDINGS**

Based on the responses collected from 70 Mass Media students, the findings indicate that hate following is a common behavior among participants. A majority of 55.7% respondents reported that they follow creators or accounts they dislike, while 44.3% stated that they do not. This suggests that more than half of the participants engage in hate-following behavior.

In terms of engagement frequency, 48.6% of respondents reported that they engage with such content very often, while 31.4% do so sometimes. Only a small percentage engages rarely (12.9%) or never (7.1%). This highlights that hate-following is not passive but involves active interaction.

When analyzing the reasons behind this behavior, 37.1% of respondents stated that they follow such accounts to criticize or disagree, followed closely by 35.7% who do so out of curiosity. A smaller portion engages for entertainment (17.1%) or peer influence (10%). This indicates that negative engagement and curiosity are the primary drivers.

Emotional responses show that 47.1% of respondents feel frustrated after consuming such content, while 24.3% feel angry. Only 10% find it entertaining and 18.6% remain indifferent. This suggests that most users experience negative emotions.

Regarding digital burnout, 42.9% reported always feeling mentally exhausted after social media use, while 20% said often and 24.3% sometimes. Additionally, 80% (38.6% strongly agree and 41.4% agree) believe that engaging with disliked content contributes to stress.

Furthermore, 42.9% often continue watching content despite negative effects, and 37.1% do so sometimes, showing compulsive behavior. Although 74.3% are aware that such engagement benefits creators, many still continue. Lastly, 47.1% strongly believe that hate-following contributes to digital burnout.

Additionally, 45.7% of respondents reported that they had tried to unfollow such accounts but eventually returned to following them, while only 30% were successful in avoiding such content. This highlights the habitual and reinforcing nature of hate-following behavior within digital environments.

Overall, the findings indicate a strong correlation between hate-following behavior and digital burnout among Mass Media students, suggesting that repeated exposure to negatively perceived content contributes to emotional fatigue and reduced well-being.

## LEARNINGS

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that hate-following is a common and normalized behavior among Mass Media students. A significant number of participants engage with content they dislike, not only out of curiosity but also for criticism and emotional stimulation. This reflects a shift in digital consumption patterns where negative engagement plays an active role in audience behavior.

The study also highlights that users are aware of the negative emotional impact of such content, yet continue to engage with it. This indicates a paradox in digital behavior, where individuals voluntarily consume content that leads to frustration, anger, and mental exhaustion. The inability of many respondents to successfully avoid such content further suggests that hate-following is reinforced by habitual patterns and platform algorithms.

Additionally, the findings show a strong connection between negative content consumption and digital burnout. Frequent exposure to emotionally triggering content contributes to stress, reduced focus, and overall

mental fatigue. This suggests that digital burnout is not only caused by excessive usage but also by the nature of the content being consumed.

Another important learning from the study is the role of algorithmic systems in shaping user behavior. Digital platforms tend to prioritize content that generates higher engagement, regardless of whether the reaction is positive or negative. As a result, users are repeatedly exposed to similar types of content, making it difficult to break out of the cycle of hate-following.

Furthermore, the study highlights that emotional engagement plays a stronger role than rational decision-making in digital consumption. Even when users are aware of the negative consequences, they continue interacting with such content, indicating that emotional triggers often override conscious control.

Lastly, the research emphasizes the importance of digital self-awareness and regulation. Understanding one's own consumption patterns and recognizing the impact of negative engagement can help users make more mindful choices. This learning is especially relevant for students who are constantly exposed to digital media in both academic and personal contexts.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlights that hate-following is a significant and prevalent behavior among Mass Media students in the digital age. While social media platforms are designed to inform and entertain, they also encourage users to engage with content that evokes negative emotions. The findings reveal that a majority of students actively interact with content they dislike, often driven by curiosity, criticism, or emotional stimulation.

The study establishes a clear relationship between hate-following and digital burnout. Repeated exposure to frustrating and anger-inducing content contributes to mental exhaustion, reduced concentration, and increased stress levels. Despite being aware of the negative impact and algorithmic benefits to creators, many users continue to engage with such content, indicating a lack of control over digital consumption habits.

Furthermore, the inability of several participants to successfully avoid or unfollow such content highlights the reinforcing nature of platform algorithms and habitual behavior. This suggests that digital burnout is not only influenced by the amount of time spent online but also by the type of content consumed.

The findings of this study also contribute to a broader understanding of modern media consumption patterns.

They reveal that engagement in digital spaces is not always driven by positive interest but can also be influenced by negative emotions, which play a significant role in sustaining online interaction.

In addition, the study underscores the influence of the attention economy, where platforms are designed to maximize user engagement through emotionally stimulating content. This creates an environment where users are more likely to engage with content that provokes strong reactions, thereby reinforcing patterns like hate-following.

Finally, the research highlights the need for increased awareness and digital literacy among users. Encouraging individuals to critically evaluate their media consumption habits and reduce engagement with harmful content can help in minimizing digital burnout. Promoting healthier interaction patterns is essential for maintaining emotional well-being in an increasingly digital world.

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