

# **Infinite Scrolling Short video dan Brain Rot: Hidden Threats to Emerging Adulthood**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The development of social media with short video feature and infinite scrolling mechanisms has transformed information consumption patterns in society, particularly during the emerging adulthood phase. This study aims to explore how short video usage affects mental health and cognitive functioning. The research employed an online survey using a descriptive qualitative approach involving 24 respondents aged 18-29 years. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents spend more than three hours per day scrolling through short videos, leading to consequences such as time distortion, sleeping disturbances, reduced productivity, and a tendency toward procrastination. In addition, participants reported experiencing social pressure, feeling of insecurity, anxiety, and even signs of digital addiction. These conditions are closely related to the phenomenon of brain rot, characterized by decreased motivation and diminished clarity of thought due to continuous exposure to superficial content. This study individuals in emerging adulthood can manage social media use in a healthy, balanced, and mindful manner.*

**Keywords:** *short videos, brain rot, emerging adulthood, mental health.*

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## **ABSTRAK**

Perkembangan media sosial dengan fitur *short video* dan mekanisme *infinite scrolling* telah mengubah pola konsumsi informasi Masyarakat, khususnya pada fase *emerging adulthood*. Penelitian ini bertujuan menggali bagaimana penggunaan *short video* berdampak terhadap kesehatan mental dan fungsi kognitif. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan survey daring dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif terhadap 24 responden berusia 18-29 tahun. Hasil menunjukkan mayoritas responden *scrolling short video* lebih dari tiga jam per hari, dengan dampak berupa, distorsi waktu, gangguan tidur, penurunan produktivitas, serta kecenderungan prokrastinasi. Selain itu, muncul tekanan sosial, rasa insecure, kecemasan, hingga indikasi adiksi di gital. Kondisi tersebut berhubungan dengan fenomena *brain rot*, yaitu penurunan motivasi, serta kejernihan berpikir akibat paparan konten dangkal secara terus-menerus. Penelitian ini menegaskan perlunya regulasi diri dan literasi digital agar generasi *emerging adulthood* mampu mengelola penggunaan media sosial secara sehat, seimbang, dan berkesadaran.

**KataKunci:** *short video, brain rot, emerging adulthood, kesehatan mental.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Advenement of information and communication technology has brought about significant changes in the way individualis consume media. Social media has become an

integral part of modern society. Social media no longer serves only as a means of social interaction, but also as the main space for obtaining information, entertainment, and self-actualisation (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017). Digital platforms are rapidly evolving, offering a variety of features that make it easier for users to stay connected. One of the most notable innovations in recent years is short video content, which is available through Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts. This format stands out because it is instant, easily accessible, and presented in a personalised algorithmic flow according to user interests (Andreassen Cecilie Schou et al., 2017); (Zhang & Tan, 2023); (Syahputri et al., n.d.).

Behind its appeal, short videos bring new consequences. The infinite scrolling feature inherent in these platforms allows users to scroll through content without limits. This mechanism often makes individuals unaware of how much time they spend on their screens, causing what is known as time distortion (Alter, 2017; (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020). Research shows that excessive consumption of short videos can affect sleep quality, reduce productivity, and increase the risk of maladaptive behaviour (Chen et al., 2023); (Firdaus & Nadhiroh, 2021). From a cognitive psychology perspective, repeated exposure to short video content also triggers decision fatigue, which is mental exhaustion caused by having to continuously make small decisions such as watching, scrolling, or skipping content (Forestier et al., 2022).

This impact becomes even more significant when linked to the emerging adulthood age group (18-29 years old) as described by Arnett. This period is characterized by the search for self-identity, exploration of social relationships, and determination of career direction, making this generation vulnerable to external influences, including intensive use of digital media (Arnett, 2000; Coyne et al., 2019). When time that should be allocated for studying, working, or building real social relationships is spent scrolling through short videos, the balance of cognitive and emotional functions can potentially be disrupted (Tereshchenko, 2023).

The latest phenomenon that has emerged in relation to this is the popular term "brain rot", which is widely used on social media to describe feelings of "emptiness", loss of motivation, decreased focus, and a tendency to procrastinate due to excessive consumption of shallow digital content (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020). Although not yet formally recognized in the field of clinical psychology, this term represents a real concern among young people (Aribowo & Bagaskara, 2025). The symptoms highlighted in the discussion of brain rot show a close relationship with literature on digital addiction, attention disorders, and decreased well-being. Other studies have also found that family communication, happiness, and self-regulation can be protective factors against brain rot symptoms (Harsanto et al., 2025). However, empirical studies on the direct relationship between short videos, infinite scrolling, and brain rot are still very limited, including in the context of emerging adulthood.

Given these circumstances, this research is important to fill the gap in the literature. This study aims to identify patterns of short video consumption in the emerging adulthood phase; examine the phenomenon of brain rot in the context of mental health and digital addiction; and reveal the accompanying psychological and cognitive impacts. Thus, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to media psychology studies as well as provide practical implications for efforts to maintain the mental health of the younger generation in the digital age.

## METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach using an online survey method. The subjects involved in this study were 24 individuals who actively use social media, particularly platforms that offer short video features. All subjects were in the emerging adulthood phase, which is the developmental stage between the ages of 18 and 29, as

described by Jeffrey Arnett. In this phase, individuals experience a transition various possibilities in life, and changes in social interactions interactions (Lekatompessy et al., 2023).

Subject selection was conducted using purposive sampling techniques, with the following criteria: (1) aged between 18 and 29 years old, (2) actively using social media with short video feates for at least the past 6 months, and (3) willing to complete the questionnaire. Respondents were students and young workers, obtained through the distrubtion of Google Form links in student community WhatsApp groups amd the researcher's network of friends. The research was conducted over a period of one month from May to June 2025. The data collection instrument was an online questionnaire that included questions related to frequently used platforms, duration of short video use, impact on modd, productivity, feelings of insecurity, sleep patterns, social pressure, addiction tendencies, ways of overcoming addiction, and personal perceptions of short video use.

To maintain data validity, this study applied data triangulation. Triangulation is carried out through: (1) source triangulation, bu comparing responses between respondents to find consistent patterns; (2) theory triangulation, by linking field findings with literature reviews and previous atudies, namely by seeking input from peers/experts regarding the interpretation of research result so that they not purely subjective.

## RESULTS

Based on data analysis from 24 respondents aged 18-29 years, the following findings were obtained :

### More Frequently Used Platforms

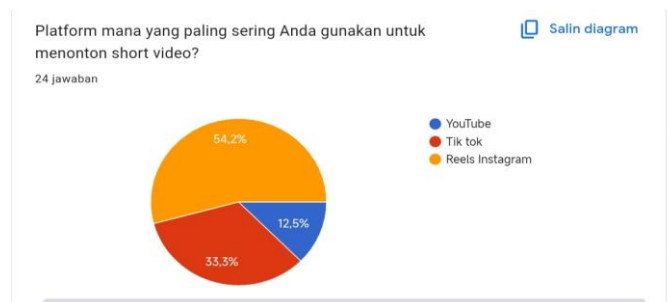


Figure 1. Distribution of Short Videos Platforms Most Frequently Used by Respondentds  
Source: Primary research data, 2025

The majority of respondents use Instagram Reels more often (54,2%), followed by Tiktok (33,3%), and Youtube Shorts (12,5%).

### Employment/Education

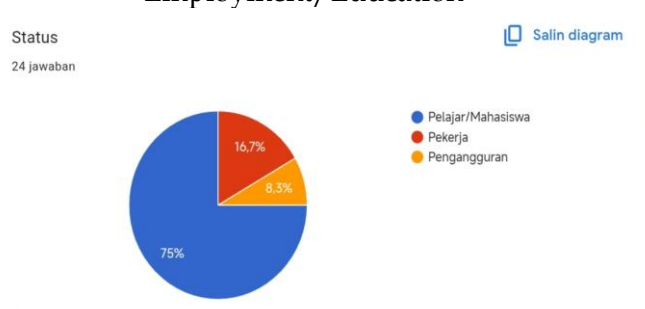


Figure 2. Respondents' Employment/Education  
Source: Primary research data, 2025

Most of the respondents were students (75%), followed by workers (16,7%), and unemployed people (8,3%).

### Most Frequently Appearing Types of Content



Figure 3. types of Content Most Frequently Appearing on respondents' Feeds  
Source: primery research data, 2025

Respondents reportef various types of content that they ofen view, including lifestyle, trending/latest news, editing, education issues, politics, motivation, religion, sports, health, trevel, culinary, funny entertainment, anf romance.

### Duration of *Short video* Consumption



Figure 4. daily Short Video Consumption Duration  
Source: primary research data, 2025

There is 37,5% respondents admitted to spending hours per day. 33,3% respondents spend more than 3-5 hours per day. And, 29,2% respondents spend more than 5 hours per day.

This indicates that more than 60% of respondents scroll through short videos for more than 3 hours per day, an indicator of potentially maladaptive behaviour.

### Fellings of Insecurity



Figure 5. Level of Self-Comparasion Feelings (Insecure) after Consuming Short Videos  
 Souch: primary research data, 2025

After scrolling through *short videos*, 50% of respondents sometimes feel they are comparing themselves 16% have done so, 8,3% do so often, while 25% do not feel this way.



Figure 6. Sleep Disturbances Due to Consuming Short Videos  
 Souch: primary research data, 2025

A total of 20,8% of respondents often, 20,8% sometimes, 33,3% rarely, and 25% never sacrifice sleep time to scroll through *short video*.



Figure 7. The effect of Short Video Consumption on productivity  
 Souch: primary research data, 2025

33,3% respondents admitted that their productivity was sometimes disrupted, 20,8% said it was often disrupted, 16,7% admitted that they were indeed affected, while 29,2% did not feel that it affected them.

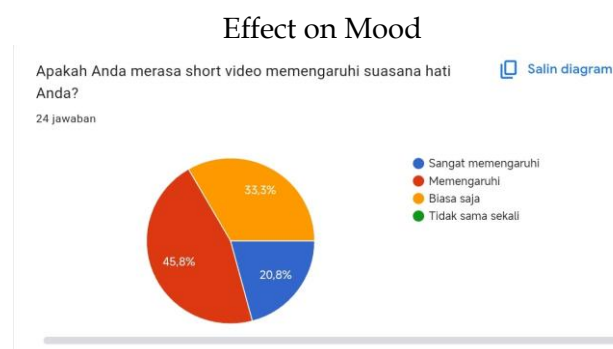


Figure 8. The effect of short video consumption on mood  
 Souch: primary research data, 2025

45,8% of respondents felt that short videos affected their mood 20,8% felt then they had a significant effect, while 33,3% felt than thay had no effect. No respondents answered “not at all”, indicating that short video content always has an emotional effect.

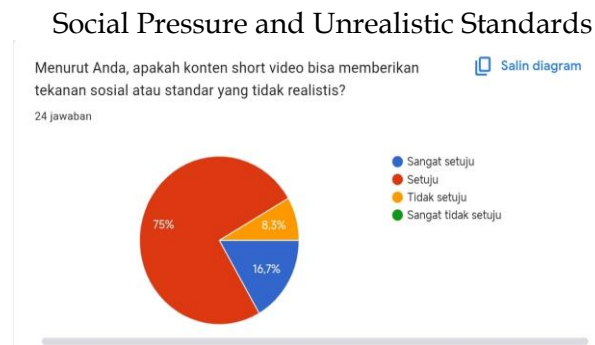


Figure 9. Social pressure and unrealistic standards resulting from short video consumption  
Source: primary research data, 2025

The majority of respondents (75%) agreed that short videos create social pressure and unrealistic standards, 16,7% strongly agreed, and only 8,3% disagreed.

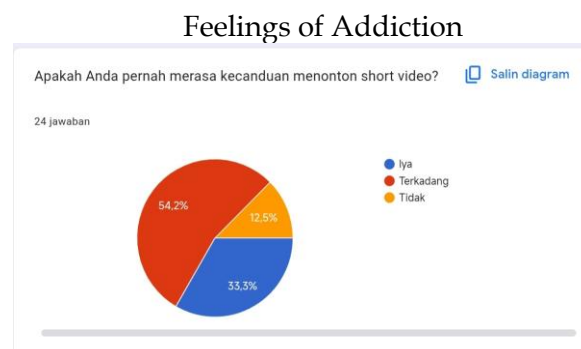


Figure 10. level of Short Video Addiction Among Respondents  
Source: primary research data, 2025

54% of respondents sometimes feel addicted, 33,3% admit to being addicted, and 12,5% state then they do not feel addicted.

### How to Overcome Addiction

Bagaimana cara anda mengatasi diri anda dari kecanduan media sosial

24 jawaban

Pake fitur hide apk, saya hide IG, TIKTOK, FB
dengan latihan futsal untuk mengejar masa depan
membatasi diri
Menjauhkan hp dari dekat kita sehingga kita tdk bisa membukanya
ada aktivitas diluar rumah
Inget tugas numpuk
Detok sosmed, murojaah
Dipaksakan agar jauh dari gadget
Hapus aplikasinya

Gambar 11. Respondents' strategies for Overcoming Short Video Addiction  
 Source: primary research data, 2025

Respondents tried to cope in various ways, including: distracting themselves (exercising, outdoor activities), limiting themselves (using the hide feature, putting their mobil phone away), detoxing from social media, remembering their duties, reciting of Qur'an, and even deleting applications.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that phenomenon of short video consumption among emerging adults is not only recreational in nature, but also supports significant psychological and social consequences. These findings can be understood in the context of increasingly intensive and algorithmic digital media exposure, as described in the introduction. Short video available on platforms such as Instagram Reels, Tiktok, and Youtube Shorts not only fulfil entertainment and information needs but also create nama dynamic in meida consumption patterns that directly impact mental health, motivation and sosial, and social interaktif.

### Interaction Patterns and Platform Preferences

The majority of respondents use Instagram Reels more often (54,2%), followed by Tiktok (33,3%), and Youtube Shorts (12,5%). This indicates a shift in preference towards platform with a broader social ecosystem (such as Insagram) compared to applications that are exclusively based on *short video* (Tiktok).

This shift can be explained through social-integrative motives, namely the desire to remain connected within a broader social network while still enjoying instant entertainment features. In this context of Instagram Reels, users do not just scroll through content, but can interact through likes, comments, sharing stories and connecting with other social activities (such as DMs or story feeds), which makes the experience more integrated. In other words, short videos are no longer positioned solely as passive entertainment but as an integral part of social identity (Maheswari et al., 2023), self-actualisation (Yurliana et al., 2022)) and a means of maintaining social cohesion in the digital world (Siahaan, 2025).

### Duration of Use Indications of Digital Addiction

More than 60% of respondents spend more than 3 hours per day scrolling through short videos. This duration indicates a tendency toward maladaptive behaviour, as described by Alter (2017) in relation to the illusion of inifinity in infinite scrolling system. This pattern aligns with findings on time distortion (Rixen et al., 2023) where respondents are not fully



aware of the amount of time wasted due to being trepped in a cycle pf constanly updated content. These result are also consistent with the concept of a *variable reward system*(Montag & Rumpf, 2021) which stimulates the brain to continuously seek new stimuli, thereby encouraging consumptive behaviour.

Data showing that 54% of respondents “sometimes” feel addicted reinforces the suspicion of digital addiction. This phenomenon can be linked to the term brain rot, which is cognitive decline due to excessive consumption of shallow digital content(Satici et al., 2023). In this case, the habit of scrolling through short videos is not merely a form of relaxation, but is shifting towards an addictive pattern that weakens self-control and focus. This is in line with findings that low self-control correlates with higher levels of addiction (Chamila Mile & Febriyona, 2023)

#### Psychological Impact: Social Pressure, Insecurity and FoMO

As many as 50% of respondents admitted that they sometimes feel compelled to compare themselves with others after consuming short videos, and 75% is agreed that such content creates social pressure and unrealistic standards. This is consistent with social comparasion theory (Festinger, 1954) which exolains that individuals tend to evaluate themselves by comparing their achivements, lifestyles, or appearances to belive that external conditions or socially approved benchmarks are more important than internal and personal characteristics, which in turn has the potential to damage self-esteem (Yulianto & Virlia, 2023). This phenomenon whows that short videos are not of living, medium of entertainment but also a symbolic aren where atandars of living, beauty, and success are constructed and reproduced. These findings are in line with (Andreassen Cecilie Schou et al., 2017)research on the role of social media in reinforcing the need for social recognition and the fear of missing out on trend and information (FoMO). The combination of social comparasion and FoMO can increase social anxiety, feelings of dissatisfaction, and even mild symptoms of depression in some vulnerable individuals.

The above explanation is reinforced by Novita’s (2022) research, which reveals that social pressure created by high-standard content can trigger feelings of insecurity, which ultimately impacts emotional well-being. tn the long term, this condition has the potential to reinforce the cycle og brain rot, where individuals become trapped in excessive consumption of shallow content—particulary thorough social media—which erodes mental health and self-esteem.

#### Sleep Disorders and Productivity

The data shows that 20,8% of respondents often sacrifice sleep time to scroll through short videos, and 33,3% feel that their productivity is sometimes distruped. The following results reinforce the view that the use of short videos has real consequences for daily life patterns. The time distortion experienced by users not only result in the loss of productive hours, but also has implications for physical and psychological helath thorough sleep disruption. As in previous studies that revealed that other effects of short video usage can reduce sleep rhythms and sleep quality, increase the risk of insomnia, and decrease productivity (Chevin Alziqraf et al., 2024). In addictions, the stimulus of short video content at night can also inhibit melatonin production and increase physiological stress-adding to the burden on individual’s mental health and daily concentration.

From a neuroscience perspective, excessive consumption of short content can lead to increased cognitive workload (Madigan et al., 2020), while reducing the brain’s ability to perform selective attention. As a result, individuals are more prone to decision fatigue (Forestier et al., 2022), which manifests itself in difficulty prioritizing between digital entertainment and academic or work obligations. In psychological literature, decision fatigue is described as a state of mental exhausting resulting from continuounslly making decisions



within a certain timeframe. This phenomenon is related to ego depletion, where self-control resources decrease with the number of decisions made—making individuals more impulsive, avoiding decisions, or lowering the quality of decisions made. This concept is further explained by Campuspedia, which states that the brain's capacity for decision-making is limited. When overloaded, the brain becomes fatigued, leading to irrational or delayed decision-making.

#### Emotional Impact and Self-Regulation

Interestingly, 100% of respondents acknowledged that short videos always have an emotional effect, albeit to varying degrees. As many as 45,8% felt that their mood was affected and 20,8% even felt strongly affected. These findings show that short videos content works effectively on the affective lever. This is in line with the effective needs described by Nurdin in Rustandi (L. Rudy Rustandi, 2022). However, the dominant emotional effect also carries a risk, whereby users seek validation or mood boosters from digital content rather than from real activities.

However, some respondents indicated that they employed self-regulation strategies, such as diverting their attention by exercising, undergoing digital detox, or even deleting applications. This indicates a level of digital awareness that emphasises limiting screen time and increasing real-world interactions as a form of long-term prevention against digital addiction among emerging adults. This is intended to balance entertainment needs with mental health. However, these strategies are still individual and situation, and have not yet become consistent regulatory patterns.

#### *Brain Rot* as a Further Implication

All of the above findings suggest that short video consumption patterns in emerging adulthood are closely related to symptoms that lead to the phenomenon of brain rot. Symptoms such as decreased focus, a tendency to procrastinate, anxiety, and feelings of “emptiness” are reflections of a decline in the quality of cognitive interaction. From a neuroscience perspective, this condition can slow down brain neuroplasticity (Choudhary, 2025), as it results from a lack of challenging cognitive stimuli.

Accordingly, although brain rot has not been officially recognized in clinical psychology, the result of this study indicates that the phenomenon has a clear empirical basis. Emerging adulthood, as a transition phase of development, is particularly vulnerable because individuals are searching for identity, emotional stability, and direction in life. Tripped in consumption patterns.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that short videos with infinite scrolling systems have shaped intense media consumption patterns in the emerging adulthood phase. The majority of respondents spend more than three hours per day scrolling which was initially interpreted as a means of entertainment, a way to fill spare time, and a mechanism for escaping academic and social pressures. This usage also provides opportunities for instant social connection. However, behind the benefits, there are negative consequences that cannot be ignored. Serious risks include digital addiction, distorted perception of time, sleep disorders, productivity issues, and a tendency to procrastinate. Social pressure, insecurity, and symptoms of anxiety also accompany these risks, which are ultimately linked to the phenomenon of brain rot—characterised by a decline in focus, clarity of thought, and motivation due to repeated exposure to shallow content.

Therefore, this study confirms that the use of short videos needs to be balanced with strong self-regulation and adequate digital literacy. This is necessary so that social media does

not only become a source of distruction, but can also be used in a healthy and constructive manner for individual development during emerging adulthood.

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