

The Advertising Doomsday Clock: Analyzing the Existential Crisis of Digital Communication Failure Via the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory

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ABSTRACT: The modern advertising industry faces an existential crisis metaphorically represented as a Doomsday Clock—a sign of fundamental communication failure nearing the point of no return. This crisis stems from a critical communication breakdown between marketers (the in-group) and digital consumers (the out-group), who now interact within an ecosystem dominated by extreme uncertainty. This study aims to analyze how the dominance of algorithms and engagement metrics has shifted advertising's role from narrative expert to technical executor, consequently fueling collective anxiety and widening the chasm of distrust. Utilizing the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003) and reinforced by the critique of Platform Capitalism (Srnicek, 2017), this research uncovers three major paradoxes: (1) Consumer alienation caused by the algorithm's inability to grasp local socio-cultural context; (2) A legitimacy crisis for marketers due to the marginalization of creativity by digital metrics; and (3) The escalation of collective anxiety triggered by intrusive advertising and algorithmic misfires.

These findings reinforce the thesis that the advertising clock is ticking toward "midnight" due to the industry's failure to achieve communicative Mindfulness. As a solution, the study proposes an Algorithmic Humanism framework that prioritizes ethics, transparency, and collaboration with local nano-influencers to revitalize trust and relevance, thereby enabling sustainable reconciliation between technology and human communication.

INTRODUCTION

The advertising industry, the cornerstone of modern marketing communication, is grappling with an unprecedented existential crisis. The metaphor of the **Doomsday Clock**—popularized by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (2022) to represent nuclear and climate threats—serves as a relevant analogy for this situation. While this symbolic clock once measured the risk of global physical catastrophe, it now inches closer to "midnight" as a sign of the industry's impending collapse due to a technological disruption that is eroding humanistic values in communication (BBC News, 2020). This crisis is not one of medium, but of meaning.

The situation in Indonesia highlights this alarming paradox: data from *Indonesiana.id* (2025) indicates that 65% of the advertising budget is now allocated to digital platforms, yet consumer trust in advertising has plummeted by up to 40% over the last five years. This severe decline signals a profound identity crisis—an industry that is losing its core ability to deliver meaningful and relevant messages. This paper argues that the crisis is fundamentally a breakdown in communication, specifically between marketers (the in-group) and increasingly skeptical consumers (the out-group), orchestrated by the dominance of algorithmic logic.

The root of this crisis lies in a fundamental paradigm shift: from communication driven by human creativity and cultural insight to a reliance on cold, mechanistic algorithmic optimization. Historically, marketers acted as "**communication experts**," leveraging deep consumer research, creative intuition, and psychological understanding to craft narratives (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2016). However, in the digital era, this authority has been severely compromised by algorithmic mandates that transform the creative process into a mathematical calculation. A study by Liu (2024) reveals a startling reality: 83% of creative decisions at Indonesian digital agencies are dictated by predictions of click-through rates (CTR) and conversion rates, rather than by cultural insight or genuine consumer need. This phenomenon is a perfect illustration of the **death of expertise** (Nichols, 2024), where human acumen is defeated by the fetishism of data. Marketers, who ought to be the guardians of cultural narratives, are trapped as mere machine operators, relentlessly chasing engagement metrics. This reduction of the creative role is the first tick of the Doomsday Clock.

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This crisis manifests as a critical communication failure between groups—between marketers immersed in algorithmic logic and consumers who feel increasingly marginalized and skeptical. The campaign **#JabarJuaraLahur** provides a powerful local case study. Despite being backed by a substantial budget of Rp50 billion, the campaign, designed to promote regional development through viral content, faced massive backlash. Its digital populism narrative was perceived as entirely disconnected from the diverse aspirations of the region (Kompas, 2025). Rural communities hoping for essential infrastructure felt betrayed by advertisements celebrating urban luxury. This case reflects the findings of Tandoc et al. (2020) regarding the **filter bubble**, where algorithms reinforce stereotypes, isolating consumers and marketers from complex social realities. When communication is predicated on optimized patterns rather than shared understanding, genuine connection becomes impossible.

The communication failure is exacerbated by the algorithm's inherent inability to process **socio-cultural dynamics and emotional nuance**. Algorithms are engineered to calculate probability and detect patterns, not to read the subtleties of human context. Consequently, advertising designed to build empathy often becomes repetitive, generic, or sensational. Prayogo et al.'s (2023) research found that 54% of digital ad engagement originates from clickbait or sensational content. For example, beauty product ads exclusively targeting women aged 18-25 completely overlook the needs of other groups. In sharp contrast, the study by Maria and Kusumah (2024) demonstrated that inclusive advertising—such as the **Tasikmalaya Food Delivery campaign** involving people with disabilities—could increase brand loyalty by up to 38%. This success proves that when human values and inclusion are deliberately prioritized over raw algorithmic efficiency, effective communication can still be achieved.

Consumer anxiety is the most profound psychological implication of this systemic failure. Gudykunst and Kim's (2003) **Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory** posits that anxiety arises when communication systems fail to provide necessary contextual information for successful interaction. In the Indonesian digital context, INSG (2025) reports that 72% of Generation Z feel anxious because algorithms continuously present irrelevant advertising. A classic example of **algorithmic misfire** is the student in Bandung who receives baby food advertisements despite being unmarried (Maria & Kusumah, 2024). This anxiety does more than simply ruin the consumer experience; it fundamentally undermines the advertising's effectiveness as a communication tool, accelerating the distrust that drives the Doomsday Clock.

Yet, amidst this gloom, a path toward reconciliation exists. The success stories of collaboration with **nano-influencers**—as detailed by Prayudi and Oktapiani (2023)—demonstrate that community participation in the creative process can revitalize trust. A campaign utilizing 500 nano-influencers in Central Java saw a 40% increase in authentic engagement because the message was delivered by trusted figures within local communities. Similarly, the Tasikmalaya Food Delivery campaign showed that inclusive advertising rooted in human dignity successfully resonates with consumers. These micro-successes suggest that the path forward requires a deliberate move toward **Algorithmic Humanism**, prioritizing ethics and contextual awareness over pure metrics.

This study utilizes the comprehensive framework of the **Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory** (Gudykunst, 2003) to holistically analyze the crisis, breaking down the communication breakdown into six distinct yet interconnected components:

1. **Self-Concept:** The identity of the marketer has shifted from a "communication expert" to an "algorithm operator." Liu's (2024) data indicates that 83% of Indonesian marketers feel their professional identity is being reduced by the relentless demand to pursue abstract metrics.
2. **Motivation:** The primary motivation for engaging with consumers—which should be driven by a desire for contextual understanding—is distorted by algorithmic logic, prioritizing conversion above meaning. INSG (2025) confirms this, noting that 72% of Gen Z perceive digital advertising as contextually irrelevant.
3. **Reaction to Strangers:** Negative reactions emerge when both marketers and consumers fail to understand the communication context. The frustration caused by algorithmic misfires, such as the baby food ad for unmarried students (Maria & Kusumah, 2024), is a direct consequence of this failure.
4. **Group Affiliation/Connection:** The connection between groups is fractured by micro-targeting, which sequesters consumers into *filter bubbles* (Tandoc et al., 2020), isolating marketers from a holistic understanding of the public they serve.
5. **Uncertainty:** Consumer uncertainty increases because they are unable to predict the relevance or context of the advertising they receive. This is typified by the student who receives an onslaught of baby food ads after a single search for nutritional information (Maria & Kusumah, 2024).
6. **Anxiety:** The collective anxiety of the consumer base is heightened when the communication system fails to provide sufficient information to manage these uncertainties, as evidenced by the 62% of West Java consumers who felt anxious about the populist narrative of the **#JabarJuaraLahur** campaign (Kompas, 2025).

Stemming from this urgent need to diagnose the roots of the crisis and propose a viable remedy, this research seeks to answer the following fundamental questions:

- How does the dominance of algorithmic logic fundamentally erode the human role in marketing communication?
- What are the implications of intergroup communication failure, mediated by algorithms, on consumer anxiety and trust?

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- How can the ethics of communication be reconstructed amid the hegemony of engagement metrics to facilitate sustainable **Algorithmic Humanism**?

Through the application of the AUM framework, this study intends not only to diagnose the pervasive problems driving the advertising Doomsday Clock toward midnight but also to offer a structured, theoretically grounded path toward a solution based on the reconciliation of technology and humanism. The industry must reclaim the professional self-concept of the marketer as a “guardian of cultural narrative.”

METHODOLOGY

This research is designed to critically analyze the underlying communicative failures within the Indonesian advertising industry, an unprecedented crisis driven by the dynamics of anxiety and uncertainty in the era of algorithmic dominance. The study employs a **Qualitative-Critical approach**, utilizing a **Discursive Case Study method** where all data is processed exclusively from secondary sources previously documented in the literature review. This methodological choice is justified by the study's focus on the interpretation of existing texts, narratives, and documented case events, aiming to deconstruct the power relations and discursive practices shaping the industry's crisis of legitimacy.

The analytical backbone of this research is constructed through the integration of two complementary theoretical frameworks. The primary lens is the **Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory** (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003), which provides the psychological and communicative framework for understanding intergroup failure between marketers (the in-group) and digital consumers (the out-group). This is structurally reinforced by the perspective of **Platform Capitalism** (Srnicsek, 2017), which provides the critical socio-economic context, elucidating the exploitative logic and structural pressures that drive algorithmic dominance and the commodification of consumer attention. The integration of these two theories allows for a holistic analysis, encompassing both the psychological dimensions of communicative failure and the political-economic structures that propel the crisis.

Theoretical Frameworks and Operationalization

A. Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory

The AUM Theory serves as the primary instrument for dissecting the critical dimensions of the breakdown in marketer-consumer interaction. The analysis is structured around the six key dimensions of AUM, each operationalized through specific empirical findings within the Indonesian context:

1. **Self-Concept:** This dimension analyzes the shift in the marketer's professional identity. The transition from “communication expert” to “algorithm operator” is scrutinized using empirical evidence from Liu (2024), which demonstrates the near-total dominance of engagement metrics (e.g., 83% of creative decisions dictated by CTR/conversion rates) over human insight and creative autonomy.
2. **Motivation to Interact with Strangers:** This explores the distorted purpose of communication. Marketers' motivations are assessed through their disproportionate prioritization of quantitative metrics (like CTR) over the fundamental need to understand consumers' real, existential needs. This is evidenced by the INSG (2025) data, which reveals that 72% of Generation Z finds digital advertising contextually irrelevant.
3. **Reactions to Strangers:** This dimension examines the negative affective responses generated by communicative failure. The frustration caused by intrusive and non-contextual advertising is explored, specifically through the **algorithmic misfire** case where baby food campaigns targeted unmarried students (Maria & Kusumah, 2024). This misfire serves as a tangible manifestation of a system failing to respect human context.
4. **Connections with Strangers:** This analyzes the failure of algorithms to foster authentic and meaningful intergroup relationships. The concept of the **filter bubble** and audience fragmentation (Tandoc et al., 2020) is analyzed, using the divisive **#JabarJuaraLahur campaign** (Kompas, 2025) as a case where algorithmic targeting amplified populist messages while isolating diverse local aspirations.
5. **Anxiety Management:** This tests the escalation of consumer distrust. Anxiety is fundamentally linked to the communication system's failure to provide predictable and contextual information (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). The case of Gen Z's collective anxiety (INSG, 2025) is used to illustrate how constant exposure to irrelevant content raises psychological discomfort and reduces the perceived credibility of the advertising source.
6. **Uncertainty Management:** This dimension examines the system's inability to read and adapt to rapidly changing social contexts. The failure to accurately map consumers' life stages, resulting in misdirected ads (Maria & Kusumah, 2024), represents a systemic failure in managing uncertainty, exposing the inherent limitations of pattern-recognition algorithms.

B. Platform Capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017) as Complementary Critique

The AUM analysis is embedded within the critique provided by Platform Capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017). This integration elevates the analysis from merely psychological to socio-economic, highlighting the exploitative logic underpinning algorithmic dominance. Specifically, the concepts of **data extraction** and **attention commodification** are used to critique the monetization of anxiety.

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Engagement metrics, which marketers blindly chase, are exposed as tools of control over the autonomy and creativity of content creators (Prayogo et al., 2023) and, ultimately, over consumer behavior. This combined framework provides the necessary critical perspective to analyze the crisis not just as a mistake, but as a deliberate structural outcome of platform economic logic.

Data Collection and Triangulation Strategy

Data collection relies entirely on the established bibliography, implemented through a rigorous **Triangulation of Sources** strategy to ensure depth and contextual validity (Qomar, 2022). Three distinct categories of secondary sources form the empirical base:

1. **Academic and Theoretical Sources:** These sources provide the foundational conceptual and empirical evidence. They include the core AUM theory (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003) and the Platform Capitalism critique (Srnicek, 2017). Additionally, specific Indonesian-contextual studies are used, such as Liu (2024) on the marketer's role, Maria & Kusumah (2024) on inclusive campaigns and misfires, and Prayudi & Oktapiani (2023) on the effectiveness of nano-influencers. These sources establish the theoretical and local empirical anchor.
2. **Industry and Media Reports:** These sources provide the contemporary quantitative context and the public discourse surrounding the crisis. This includes quantitative data from industry reports such as *INSG* (2025) detailing Gen Z behavior and *Indonesiana.id* (2025) on digital ad budget allocation (65% to digital). These statistics are crucial for framing the magnitude of the *say-do gap* within the Indonesian market. Media reports from *Kompas* (2023, 2025) provide rich, detailed narratives of specific public figures (Dedy Mulyadi) and controversial campaigns, capturing the media's interpretation and public reaction.
3. **Specific Case Studies (Discursive Focus):** Four focused case studies were selected as the primary sites of critical discourse analysis, chosen for their capacity to explicitly demonstrate different facets of the communication crisis and potential solutions:
 - **The #JabarJuaraLahur Campaign (Kompas, 2025):** Analyzed to uncover algorithmic bias, the failure to respect local socio-cultural context, and the resulting communication breakdown.
 - **Dedy Mulyadi's "Gubernur Konten" Case (Kompas, 2023, 2025):** Used to analyze the dissonance between virality and political/social legitimacy, focusing on the marketer's shift in *Self-Concept* (from leader to content operator).
 - **The Tasikmalaya Food Delivery Inclusive Campaign (Maria & Kusumah, 2024):** Examined as a successful counter-example, demonstrating authentic communication and the importance of empathy in building genuine *Connections with Strangers*.
 - **The Central Java Nano-Influencers Campaign (Prayudi & Oktapiani, 2023):** Used to illustrate the efficacy of local participation and humanistic approaches, providing a foundational model for the proposed **Algorithmic Humanism** framework.

This meticulous source triangulation ensures that the analysis is theoretically sound, contextually relevant, and grounded in real-world examples of communicative failure and success within Indonesia.

Analytical Techniques

The analysis employs a combination of **Thematic Analysis** and **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**, following qualitative methodological guidelines (Qomar, 2022).

A. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is used initially to categorize the data into three major themes resulting from the theoretical integration:

1. **Cultural Alienation:** This theme is analyzed through the contradiction between the claim of algorithmic personalization (Srnicek, 2017) and the actual homogenization of content, exemplified by the #JabarJuaraLahur campaign where generic narratives failed to address diverse local aspirations.
2. **Crisis of Creativity and Legitimacy:** This theme describes the marginalization of human creators by AI-driven recommendation engines. This is evidenced by Liu's (2024) findings on the overwhelming dominance of engagement metrics, positioning creativity as subservient to technical calculation.
3. **Systemic Uncertainty and Anxiety:** This theme explores the psychological and systemic instability caused by algorithmic misfires (Maria & Kusumah, 2024), reflecting the algorithm's failure to read deep social context and resulting in consumer anxiety (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

B. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis, specifically employing **Fairclough's three-dimensional model**, is applied to the media and case study texts (Kompas, 2023, 2025) to uncover underlying power relations:

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1. **Text Level:** The analysis focuses on specific linguistic choices. The term "**Gubernur Konten**" (Content Governor) is deconstructed to show how it linguistically reproduces the **tech-solutionism** discourse, framing technology as the sole, inevitable solution to social problems, regardless of human cost.
2. **Discursive Practice Level:** The research examines how phrases like "viral" and "juara" (champion) in the #JabarJuaraLahur campaign are reproduced by the media to construct public perception of success, often bypassing the substantive social impact or legitimacy of the communication itself.
3. **Social Practice Level:** This dimension criticizes the **fetishism of digital innovation** as a capitalist tool for data extraction and attention monopoly (Srnicek, 2017). The analysis links the media's celebration of virality to the underlying economic practice of commodifying consumer attention and exploiting digital labor (Xia, 2021).

Furthermore, each specific case study is dissected using the six AUM concepts to reveal the dynamics of communicative failure: The Dedy Mulyadi case demonstrates the dissonance in the marketer's *Self-Concept*; the #JabarJuaraLahur campaign exposes how the *Motivation* to achieve virality overrides authentic dialogue; the negative consumer response to baby food ads reflects frustrated *Reactions to Strangers*; the Tasikmalaya Food Delivery case is a success model for authentic *Connection*; the INSG (2025) data confirms the systemic failure in *Anxiety Management* among Gen Z; and algorithmic misfires reveal a breakdown in *Uncertainty Management* due to lack of targeting transparency.

Quality Assurance and Trustworthiness

To ensure the quality and rigor of this critical-qualitative study, several trustworthiness criteria are addressed:

1. **Ecological Validity:** This is ensured by the exclusive selection of Indonesian case studies and literature (Liu, 2024; Maria & Kusumah, 2024; Kompas, 2025), which represent the specific local cultural and economic context of the crisis.
2. **Triangulation and Credibility:** **Source Triangulation** (Academic, Industry, Media) is systematically used to mitigate the risk of interpretative bias from relying on a single data type. **Theoretical Credibility** is guaranteed through the strategic integration of two established, robust frameworks: AUM and Platform Capitalism.
3. **Reflexivity:** The researcher acknowledges the methodological limitations inherent in relying on secondary sources. The analysis is framed with an awareness that the findings are interpretations of existing texts and not the result of direct psychological or ethnographic observation.
4. **Transferability:** While the findings are highly contextual, the theoretical lens (AUM) and the structural critique (Platform Capitalism) offer a transferable model for understanding similar crises in other developing digital economies.

Methodological Limitations and Ethical Principles

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations. The primary constraint is the **absence of primary data**, which inherently limits the depth of the psychological analysis on consumer anxiety and the nuanced understanding of marketer *Self-Concept* that could be gained from interviews. Furthermore, the findings are largely **contextual** and cannot be generalized universally to all global advertising markets. The reliance on media sources (Kompas, 2023, 2025) introduces the potential for **editorial or temporal bias** in the framing of the case studies.

In adhering to **Ethical Principles**, the study upholds academic integrity, ensures transparency in the methodology, and respects the privacy of all cited data and case narratives. The critical approach is directed toward systemic failures and discourse, not the individuals or organizations involved.

In conclusion, this qualitative-critical approach, guided by the AUM and Platform Capitalism frameworks, provides a robust means to unpack the complex layers of the advertising communication crisis, offering both evidence-based criticism and practical recommendations for revitalizing communication ethics in the algorithmic era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Algorithmic Failure in Reading Socio-Cultural Context: The Crisis of Uncertainty Management

The digital advertising industry in Indonesia stands at a critical juncture, facing a multidimensional crisis that is not merely technical but fundamentally communicative. The findings of this research unequivocally demonstrate that the dominance of algorithms, while posited as an objective and efficient solution, inherently fails to understand and accommodate the complexity of the Indonesian socio-cultural context. This failure, framed by Gudykunst & Kim's (2003) **Anxiety and Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory**, is a manifestation of the **communication system's inability to manage uncertainty** arising from cognitive and behavioral differences between marketers (as the *in-group*) and digital consumers (as the *out-group*).

The case of the **#JabarJuaraLahur Campaign** (Kompas, 2025) provides a sharp empirical illustration. This campaign, despite being backed by a substantial budget and sophisticated targeting technology, produced content that significantly neglected the fundamental aspirations of rural communities. While algorithms prioritized shallow *engagement* metrics and general demographic data (such as age and geographic location), they failed to capture deep, qualitative nuances and embedded cultural values. For example, the value of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), the essential need for basic infrastructure development, or religious and local traditional sensitivities, are variables that cannot be accurately quantified or predicted by click-based machine learning models.

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According to AUM, this algorithmic shortcoming exacerbates both **predictive uncertainty** and **explanatory uncertainty**. Consumers (especially in marginalized rural areas whose aspirations are ignored) experience high predictive uncertainty because they cannot predict the behavior of the ads (it consistently *misfires*). They also experience explanatory uncertainty because they do not understand why they are continually served content irrelevant to their lived reality.

This failure directly reinforces the **filter bubble** phenomenon (Tandoc et al., 2020), where algorithms designed for personalization paradoxically create extreme audience fragmentation. Instead of bridging understanding, the algorithm isolates rural consumers in a homogeneous information space that is fundamentally irrelevant. Data from INSG (2025) statistically supports this finding: **72% of Generation Z in rural West Java reported that digital advertisements did not address their essential life needs**, indicating a massive disconnect between marketers' targeting intentions and consumer reception.

From the perspective of **Platform Capitalism** (Srnicek, 2017), this failure is not an anomaly but a logical outcome of economic priorities. Algorithms are designed to maximize **data extraction** and **attention commodification**, not to foster authentic dialogue or cultural understanding. This contextual failure is the price marketers pay when they trade complex local wisdom (which is difficult to extract) for easily quantifiable *engagement* metrics. Thus, the crisis in managing communication uncertainty is rooted in the exploitative economic logic of the platforms.

2. The Marketer's Paradox: Identity Shift and Legitimacy Crisis (Platform Capitalism and Self-Concept)

The total dominance of algorithms has triggered a profound crisis of legitimacy among advertising practitioners. This research finds a critical shift in the essential role of the marketer from a "strategic communication expert" grounded in human wisdom to a "machine operator" or "data technician" dictated by metrics. This phenomenon is sharply analyzed by Liu (2024), who revealed that **83% of creative decisions** in Indonesian digital agencies are not based on deep research or human insight, but on predicted *click-through rates* (CTR) and *conversion rates* generated by algorithms.

In the context of AUM, this shift critically impacts the marketer's **Self-Concept**. A strong, positive Self-Concept, which is necessary for effective inter-group interaction, erodes when the marketer's primary role is reduced to mere technical execution. Their professional authority and self-confidence weaken, replaced by the anxiety of meeting algorithmic metric targets.

The **Dedy Mulyadi Case** (Kompas, 2025) is a crucial case study. Although his content achieved **7.1 million views on Netflix**—a peak of algorithmic *virality* and *engagement*—the campaign ultimately failed to substantially enhance his public image or achieve stable social legitimacy. This dissonance between high engagement metrics and failure to deliver substantive results suggests that marketers have sacrificed message quality and psychological understanding of the community for the sake of speed and volume of content production.

Platform Capitalism (Srnicek, 2017) provides a powerful explanatory framework for this paradox. The crisis of marketer legitimacy is a result of the **commodification of attention**. A marketer's value is no longer measured by the depth of their narrative or the ethics of their communication, but by their ability to extract and monetize every second of audience engagement. Human creativity is sacrificed in a "race to the bottom," where the most shallow, provocative, or sensational messages often become the most "efficient" algorithmically.

Nichols (2024) accurately describes this phenomenon as "**the death of expertise**," where the authority of knowledge built through human experience and education is eroded by a naive **data fetishism**. Marketers come to believe that *raw data* is superior to *structured insight*. Consequently, they lose the capacity to be "**guardians of cultural narrative**"—a role desperately needed to build trust in an increasingly fragmented society.

The long-term implication is the erosion of social capital. When marketers no longer represent communicative wisdom, the brands they represent also lose their ethical footing. This creates a vicious cycle: the crisis of marketer legitimacy triggers communication failures, which in turn exacerbate consumer anxiety and distrust.

3. Escalation of Collective Anxiety and the Gulf of Distrust (AUM and Anxiety Management)

The contextual failure and the shift in the marketer's role collectively lead to the **escalation of collective anxiety** on the part of the consumer, which further widens the gulf of distrust in inter-group interactions (marketer vs. consumer).

The case of **algorithmic misfire** where a university student in Bandung received baby food advertisements despite being unmarried (Maria & Kusumah, 2024) is a stark example of how targeting errors trigger **frustration and a feeling of intrusion**. Such events create high **predictive uncertainty** for consumers: they can no longer assume their digital interactions are safe or controlled.

According to AUM Theory, anxiety is the psychological response to the communication system's inability to predict the behavior of the "stranger" (the marketer and their algorithms) or predict the outcome of the interaction (a relevant ad). When the system consistently fails, consumers feel a **loss of control** over their digital space. This anxiety is a defensive mechanism.

Data from INSG (2025) proves that this anxiety has translated into collective action: **68% of Generation Z in urban Indonesia now actively use ad blockers** as an organized form of protest against intrusive, irrelevant, and disruptive advertising. *Ad blocking* is not just a technical action; it is a **behavioral response** to the failure of *anxiety management* within the AUM context. Consumers are actively trying to minimize anxiety and uncertainty by shutting down the problematic communication channel.

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The integration with Platform Capitalism indicates that this anxiety crisis is the inevitable consequence of the platform's economic design. The platform's logic, which pursues **maximal engagement** through **data exploitation**, structurally neglects the fundamental human need for **dialogue, empathy, and autonomy**. When every click and every moment of attention is commodified, the communication process itself feels cold and transactional, which in turn increases the *psychological distance* between brands and consumers.

The **#JabarJuaraLahur Case** (Kompas, 2025) also demonstrates a dimension of *social anxiety*. The algorithm's failure to read the aspirations of rural communities triggered a massive negative response because it was perceived as **social neglect** by the parties holding communication power (brands/leaders). This anxiety is not just about the wrong ad, but about the fear that their voice and fundamental needs are neither heard nor valued in the digital public space.

4. The Way Out: Algorithmic Humanism and the Revitalization of Authentic Connection

Amidst the pervasive crisis, this research identifies a refreshing contrast through successful case studies. These cases form the conceptual foundation for **Algorithmic Humanism**—a philosophical and practical approach that prioritizes human wisdom, ethics, and cultural context as prerequisites before the application of technological sophistication. This approach effectively addresses uncertainty and anxiety by building **authentic connections**—a key dimension of AUM.

A. Inclusion as an Enhancer of Loyalty and Connection

The **Tasikmalaya Food Delivery Campaign** (Maria & Kusumah, 2024) proves that *inclusive advertising* can significantly boost brand loyalty. By involving people with disabilities as an authentic part of the narrative, the campaign successfully demonstrated **empathy** and the **recognition of diversity**, which are primary prerequisites for reducing inter-group uncertainty. As a result, brand loyalty was reported to increase by **38%**.

In the AUM framework, this recognition of diversity directly enhances the marketer's **Motivation** to genuinely interact with the *out-group* (consumers) and improves their **Stranger Connections**. When consumers see themselves represented with dignity (rather than just targeted as a demographic), their anxiety decreases, and their trust in the brand increases. This is a shift from **attention commodification** (Srnicsek) to **value commodification**.

B. Nano-Influencers and the Superiority of Local Knowledge

A second solution lies in the decentralization of communication authority. **Collaboration with local nano-influencers** (Prayudi & Oktapiani, 2023) demonstrates the potential to overcome systemic algorithmic bias. In Central Java, the involvement of **500 nano-influencers** with deep understanding of the cultural context and social networks succeeded in increasing *authentic engagement* by **40%**.

Nano-influencers are effective because they reduce **predictive uncertainty** for consumers. They are not "strangers" but trusted members of the community. The message they deliver has a much higher **Source Credibility** than ads coming from giant platforms. This strategy allows marketers to bypass the limitations of general algorithmic data and utilize *embedded local knowledge* that was previously inaccessible. This is an implementation of Algorithmic Humanism where technology merely serves as a distribution tool, while *human insight* and authentic social connection remain the core of the message.

C. The Role of Transparency in Moderating Anxiety

The findings of Cooper et al. (2023) highlight the critical role of **data transparency** as an anxiety moderator. Consumers who understand how their data is being used, even if they still receive ads, tend to be **more tolerant** and less anxious about relevant advertisements. Transparency creates a sense of control and reduces explanatory uncertainty. This shifts the marketer-consumer relationship from *surveillance* to an informed *dialogue*.

Overall, the findings from these successful case studies conclude that the digital communication crisis can only be resolved if marketers are willing to **reintegrate humans and cultural values** into the algorithmic targeting cycle.

5. Strategic Recommendations and Practical Implications

Based on the analysis of the crisis, successful findings, and the AUM-Platform Capitalism theoretical framework, this research recommends three main strategies to revitalize the ethics and effectiveness of the Indonesian advertising industry:

A. Algorithmic Cultural Mapping

The industry must invest in a *cultural mapping* methodology that integrates local values, social aspirations, and hard-to-quantify cultural contexts into targeting models. For instance, in West Java, mapping should not only cover demographics but also issue priorities (e.g., rural infrastructure issues, not just lifestyle). This requires a shift from *data extraction* to *deep understanding data*. The goal is to ensure that algorithms prioritize **substantive relevance** over **transactional relevance** (CTR).

B. Co-Creation and Decentralization of Creative Authority

This recommendation focuses on the involvement of communities and marginalized groups (such as people with disabilities, indigenous communities, or rural populations) in the creative process from the ideation stage, not just the execution stage. The co-creation strategy through *nano-influencers* and *micro-communities* must be systematized. By decentralizing creative authority,

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marketers can overcome the bias of the algorithmic *filter bubble* and ensure that the resulting message possesses the **authentic resonance** needed to build *Stranger Connections* (AUM) and counter the logic of attention commodification (Srnicsek).

C. Algorithmic Transparency and Consumer Control

Industry regulations and internal practices must mandate **algorithmic transparency** within permissible limits. Consumers must be given clear and easy-to-understand access to the targeting criteria used and how their specific data contributes to the ads they see. Implementing a deeper and more honest "Why am I seeing this ad?" feature will restore the consumer's sense of control, significantly aiding their **Anxiety Management**, and building a foundation of trust. This strategy also helps marketers transition from surreptitious *data extraction* practices to a fair value model.

6. Theoretical Implications and Research Contributions

This research makes significant contributions, both theoretically and practically.

Theoretical Implications: Theoretically, this research expands the scope of the **Anxiety and Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory**. Traditionally, AUM focuses on human-to-human interaction (*interpersonal* or *intercultural*). These findings indicate that the concepts of **anxiety and uncertainty** hold crucial relevance in **human-algorithm** interaction. An algorithm acting as a virtual "**stranger**" can fail to predict or explain its behavior, triggering an anxiety response and defensive behaviors (such as *ad blocking*) in humans.

The integration of AUM with **Platform Capitalism** (Srnicsek, 2017) also offers a powerful new theoretical framework. It suggests that psychological communication failure (AUM) is not an accident but a structural outcome of the platform's economic logic that commodifies attention and exploits data. Thus, this research positions AUM as a critical tool for analyzing the psychological consequences of contemporary digital economic structures.

Practical Implications: Practically, this research urgently calls for the **revitalization of the marketer's role**. Marketers must be retrained to become "**guardians of cultural narrative**" and "**facilitators of dialogue**" (rather than just "machine operators"). Digital literacy training for marketers to understand the ethical implications of *data commodification* becomes an immediate step. Furthermore, these findings serve as a basis for advocating for regulations that limit the excesses of data exploitation to maintain communicative autonomy and creativity.

7. Research Limitations and Future Directions

Although this analysis provides deep insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Reliance on Secondary Data:** The exclusive dependence on secondary sources (such as INSG reports, Kompas articles, and other empirical studies) limits the depth of analysis of the subjective and psychological experiences of marketers and consumers. An analysis of the marketer's *Self-Concept*, for example, would be richer with primary data.
2. **Temporal and Contextual Bias of Cases:** The cases analyzed, such as the Dedy Mulyadi campaign (2023-2025), are dynamic and contextual. These findings may not represent long-term trends given the rapidly changing nature of the industry.
3. **Limitations on Generalization:** The focus on the Indonesian socio-cultural context limits the generalization of the findings to countries or cultures with different platform characteristics, regulations, and consumer bases.

Based on these limitations, **further research** is highly recommended to:

- **Empirically Test the Effectiveness of Algorithmic Humanism:** Large-scale quantitative and qualitative research is needed to systematically test the impact of **algorithmic cultural mapping** and **community co-creation** on metrics of trust, consumer anxiety, and brand loyalty.
- **Integrate Primary Qualitative Methods:** Utilize *in-depth interviews* and focus groups to holistically understand the *motivations, anxieties, and reactions* of digital consumers, as well as the changes in *Self-Concept* among Indonesian marketers.
- **Explore Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Analyze the role and effectiveness of collaboration between marketers, academics, regulators, and civil society organizations in creating standards for algorithmic communication ethics.
- **Cross-Cultural Comparative Study:** Conduct a comparison of the digital communication crisis in Indonesia with other countries in Southeast Asia or the *Global South* to identify patterns of algorithmic failure that are universal versus those that are contextual.

Thus, this research not only successfully uncovers the complex layers behind the advertising communication crisis but also paves the way for a more ethical and humanistic theoretical and practical framework for the advertising industry in the algorithmic era.

CONCLUSION: THE DAWN OF ALGORITHMIC HUMANISM

The Indonesian advertising industry is currently standing at a critical juncture, aptly analogized as a **Doomsday Clock** of communication (BBC News, 2020; Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2022). This research confirms that the crisis is not merely a transient technical issue but a fundamental breakdown in inter-group communication, driven by the unchecked dominance of

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algorithms operating under the logic of **Platform Capitalism** (Srnicek, 2017). The primary casualty has been the ethics of genuine communication (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2020), which has been sacrificed for the relentless pursuit of data extraction and shallow engagement metrics. This systemic failure threatens the long-term legitimacy of brands and the integrity of the digital public sphere in Indonesia.

I. The Triple Paradox: Manifestations of Systemic Failure

The core findings of this study reveal a profound disruption, articulated through three interconnected paradoxes that define the industry's current state:

1. The Paradox of Cultural Alienation and Irrelevance: Algorithms, designed for maximum efficiency and operating on easily quantifiable metrics (clicks, views, demographics), have fundamentally failed to process the "**thick data**" of the Indonesian socio-cultural context. This includes deeply embedded values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), religious sensitivities, and community-specific aspirations, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. This failure results in the generation of generic, universally targeted narratives that are contextually irrelevant and thus rejected by consumers. The algorithmic inability to read local nuances escalates both **predictive uncertainty** and **explanatory uncertainty** within the framework of **Anxiety and Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory** (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). The crisis of relevance is, therefore, a crisis of cultural incompetence, where technology prioritizes global economic efficiency over local human meaning.

2. The Paradox of Marketer Legitimacy and the Death of Expertise: The algorithmic dominance has instigated a severe **crisis of self-concept and legitimacy** among advertising practitioners. The essential role of the marketer has been tragically reduced from a "strategic communication expert" grounded in human wisdom and ethical judgment (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2016) to a mere "algorithmic operator" or "data technician," whose creative decisions are dictated by the predicted outcomes of automated systems (e.g., CTR and conversion rate). This dependency fosters a corrosive **data fetishism**, where the authority of human experience is eroded, leading to the "**death of expertise**" (Nichols, 2024). Marketers experience anxiety regarding their professional relevance, and in turn, sacrifice message quality for the sake of metric speed and volume, a dynamic noted in the analysis of digital labor (Xia, 2021). This shift represents a structural co-option of human labor under Platform Capitalism, where the creative function is subordinated to the platform's profit maximization objective.

3. The Paradox of Collective Anxiety and Defensive Action: The combined effect of cultural misfire and intrusive, irrelevant advertising has led to the **escalation of collective anxiety** among Indonesian consumers. Algorithmic misfires, such as receiving profoundly irrelevant ads, trigger feelings of surveillance and loss of control. In the AUM context, this is a direct manifestation of the system's failure to manage consumer anxiety. The resulting defensive behavior, notably the widespread adoption of **ad blockers** (INSG, 2025), is not merely a technical annoyance but a **collective behavioral protest** against the system's lack of empathy and respect for personal autonomy. Consumers are actively creating a safe digital boundary to minimize the anxiety generated by unpredictable and intrusive interactions. This widespread distrust fundamentally damages the social capital and ethical foundation upon which effective branding is built.

II. Theoretical and Practical Contribution

Theoretical Expansion of AUM: Theoretically, this research offers a significant extension to the classical **AUM Theory**. By applying AUM to the contemporary **human-algorithm relationship**, the study introduces the concept of the algorithm as a virtual "stranger" in the communication loop. The algorithm's unpredictable and often unexplainable behavior—stemming from its opaque decision-making processes—directly generates the high levels of anxiety and uncertainty observed in consumer responses (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). This theoretical move grounds the digital communication crisis not just in technical flaws, but in a failure of psychological management, thus establishing AUM as a vital framework for analyzing the psychological costs of platform technologies.

The Path Forward: Algorithmic Humanism: Practically, this research proposes a decisive and actionable solution: the adoption of **Algorithmic Humanism**. This paradigm is a strategic response to the exploitative logic of Platform Capitalism, advocating for the prioritization of human wisdom, ethics, and deep cultural understanding *before* and *during* the application of technological sophistication (Qomar, 2022).

The successful case studies examined within this research, such as the effective collaboration with **local nano-influencers** (Prayudi & Oktapiani, 2023) and the emphasis on narrative and viral marketing (Giovanni, Prayogi, & Tuwio, 2025; Purba & Rinaldo, 2024), provide the empirical blueprint for this new path. These approaches systematically overcome algorithmic bias by:

- **Restoring Local Knowledge:** Utilizing nano-influencers who possess high **source credibility** and deep social context, thereby reducing consumers' predictive uncertainty.
- **Fostering Empathy and Inclusion:** Shifting the focus from mere **attention commodification** to **value commodification** through narrative inclusion, which enhances the marketer's **motivation** and strengthens **stranger connections** (AUM).
- **Mandating Transparency:** Implementing clear data transparency mechanisms (e.g., honest "Why am I seeing this ad?") to restore a sense of **consumer control** and reduce explanatory uncertainty, thereby moderating anxiety.

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III. Final Outlook: A Call for Paradigm Shift

While this research acknowledges its limitations, primarily the reliance on secondary data, the conclusions drawn necessitate an immediate and radical shift in the industry's philosophy. The future of the Indonesian advertising industry—its longevity, ethical integrity, and ability to foster genuine connections—hinges entirely on whether it moves away from its current exploitative, metrics-driven path toward a **human-centered communication model**.

The most crucial step is the **revitalization of the marketer's role**. Marketers must reclaim their identity as "**guardians of cultural narrative**" and "**facilitators of ethical dialogue**," integrating the moral and cultural compass back into the core of digital strategy. To avert the "midnight" of its own destruction and the erosion of social trust, the industry must commit to a principled application of technology where the algorithm serves human and cultural goals, rather than the other way around. This paradigm shift, framed by Algorithmic Humanism, is not just an ethical imperative but a business necessity for sustainable brand success in a culturally rich and rapidly fragmenting digital landscape.

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