

## NAVIGATING INFORMATION OVERLOAD FOR SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL FUTURES IN STUDENTS

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the influence of information overload on students' decision postponement in purchasing local skincare products, with social media exhaustion acting as a mediating variable. The research targets 150 university students in Purwokerto, a digitally active demographic frequently exposed to promotional content on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the SmartPLS software. The results indicate that information overload significantly contributes to decision postponement, and this relationship is partially mediated by social media exhaustion. Students who experience excessive and conflicting information tend to suffer from digital fatigue, which reduces their ability to make timely and confident purchasing decisions. The findings highlight the urgency of addressing cognitive and emotional burdens caused by unfiltered digital exposure. From a managerial perspective, the study provides valuable insights for local skincare brands to design more ethical, targeted, and sustainable digital marketing strategies that align with the psychological well-being of their student audiences.

**Keywords:** information overload, local skincare product, sustainable digital futures

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### INTRODUCTION

Social media, has evolved into an integrated part in almost all aspects of daily life, changing the way people communicate, share information, and make decisions (Tyrväinen et al., 2025). In terms of business, social media provides a great opportunity to introduce products and services to consumers in a more personal and direct way. According to Munir et al. (2018) Social media is not only used as a communication tool, but it is also used to strengthen brand image and improve interaction with consumers. The accessibility and widespread use of digital platforms affects consumer behavior, especially in the process of returning purchase-related decisions.

On the other hand, although social media has many advantages, the use of these platforms can lead to other problems, such as information overload or information overload. Information overload arises when consumers as decision-makers receive information in quantities that exceed their capacity to then process it effectively in making decisions (Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020). This is experienced by various groups of individuals in the society who are connected to information. One of them is consumers who shop online, making purchasing decisions more complex due to excess information (Al-Youzbaky & Hanna, 2022).

Although social media offers a variety of benefits, research and experience show the negative impact that users can feel, ultimately detrimental to their well-being (Tyrväinen et al., 2025). The more often social media is used, consumers tend to start feeling tired or bored with content that keeps appearing, so it can cause digital fatigue (Qin et al., 2024). Based on a survey conducted by the ICSC (International Council of Shopping Centers) of 1,008 Gen Z individuals, 95% of them like to shop online. Gen Z customers are a very potential market segment for e-commerce businesses (Elvil Manik

Rinonce, 2025), especially in the digitalization industry involving social media platforms and products such as skincare.

In the research conducted by (Jha, 2019) It shows that large amounts of information, coupled with limited consumer time and resources, prolong and complicate the consumer decision-making process. This is also reinforced by research (Hattingh et al., 2022) which revealed that excess information is positively related to social media exhaustion because users who are exposed to excessive information tend to experience mental fatigue due to difficulties in processing incoming information flows. However, the research has not been explored much in Indonesia, especially among students known as the digital native generation.

Therefore, this research is very important to fill the gaps in the existing literature (theoretical gap), as well as provide deeper insights into the behavior of digital consumers in Indonesia. It is hoped that this study can provide a deeper insight into the various factors that affect purchasing decisions, especially how information overload can play a role in influencing decision postponement and social media exhaustion as mediation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

In the context of social media, students as digital natives are very vulnerable to excessive content exposure. The content can be sourced from various platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and TikTok. Information overload in the context of the buying process refers to the amount of information received by consumers before they make a decision to buy (Huang & Zhou, 2019). In the decision-making process, one of the phenomena that often occurs is the delay of decisions. Where after considering the available options, consumers will postpone or postpone their purchase decision (Munir et al., 2018).

In research (Jha, 2019) confirming that consumers' decision-making process is becoming longer and more difficult due to the amount of information available to them and their limited time and resources. According to SSO theory, the influence of stress triggers can directly produce poor results without the need for a pressure if the pressure is very high and constant. As a result, the tendency to delay decision-making can directly increase due to information overload.

***H1: Information overload has positive affect on decision postponement.***

The speed at which information is generated and disseminated on social media is accelerating, while the ability of users to process information efficiently is not evolving with that speed (Jiang, 2022). Users are often exposed to unrelated or unimportant external information that is not in line with their choices, resulting in information overload. People may have difficulty digesting information when it is constantly presented to them uncontrollably, especially if it is unwanted or boring. This can ultimately result in psychological exhaustion (Fu et al., 2020).

This is in accordance with the findings Zhang et al. (2016) which explains that information overload can cause social network fatigue due to the over-demand of social media that comes incessantly. As explained by Fu et al. (2020) When information is given in a complicated way, people find it difficult to digest it efficiently, which leads to mental exhaustion and interferes with their ability to interact or make decisions. Based on the SSO model, it can be assumed that the higher the stressor in the form of information overload, the higher the strain in the form of social media exhaustion experienced by the individual.

***H2: Information overload has positive affect on social media exhaustion.***

Consumers who experience social media exhaustion tend to be passive observers (lurkers) and avoid activities that show high engagement, such as commenting, sharing, or even buying (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024). While an abundance of information can improve the efficiency of purchasing decisions, in excess conditions, consumers may experience fatigue in processing information that ultimately hinders effective decision-making (Chen, 2024).

Results of the research Al-Youzbaky & Hanna (2022) suggests that social media fatigue influences online purchasing decisions. This can be explained by the fact that the pressure from social media use influences consumers' decision to buy products. Studies conducted by (Munir et al., 2018) Reinforcing the results of research that the use of social media has an impact on participation in purchasing decision-making. Therefore, based on SSO theory, the strain in the form of social media exhaustion encourages the emergence of outcomes in the form of decision postponement.

***H3: Social media exhaustion has positive affect on decision postponement.***

In a study conducted by (Fu et al., 2020) Fatigue caused by this overload becomes a mediator that worsens users' decisions to reduce or stop their social media use. One of the main strengths of the Stressor–Strain–Outcome (SSO) theory is its ability to explain the mediation mechanism between the stressor and the outcome through strains. In the context of this study, social media exhaustion is a bridge that connects information overload as a stressor and decision postponement as an outcome. When students experience information overload from social media, they do not immediately postpone a decision, but experience cognitive fatigue first. This situation is the main trigger for decision delay behavior.

***H4: Social media exhaustion mediate information overlod on decision postponement***

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative method with an active student population in Purwokerto. The sample used was 150 respondents who were selected through purposive sampling based on certain criteria, such as social media use and shopping experience for skincare products. The data collected is primary data through an online questionnaire using Google Form.

Data analysis was carried out using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) which was processed with PLS version 4 software. The tests carried out include the Outer Model Test to evaluate the validity and reliability of indicators, the Inner Model Test for the relationship between latent variables, the Hypothesis Test to test the significance of the relationship, and the Mediation Test to test the role of social media fatigue as a mediator.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, we tested a series of hypotheses that aimed to understand the relationship between information overload, social media exhaustion, and decision postponement. This study specifically explores whether information overload has a positive effect on decision postponement (H1), whether information overload has a positive effect on social media exhaustion (H2), and whether social media exhaustion positively affects decision postponement (H3). In addition, we also tested whether social media exhaustion mediated the relationship between information overload and decision postponement (H4).

Table 1. Structural Model Hypothesis Testing

| Hypothesis | Relationship                                                           | Result   |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| H1         | Information Overload → Decision Postponement                           | Accepted |
| H2         | Information Overload → Social Media Exhaustion                         | Accepted |
| H3         | Social Media Exhaustion → Decision Postponement                        | Accepted |
| H4         | Information Overload → Social Media Exhaustion → Decision Postponement | Accepted |

Source: data processed

Based on Table 1, the results of the study show that information overload has a positive influence on decision postponement. This shows that students who often see advertisements for skincare products on social media platforms feel burdened and mentally tired. This is in accordance with the theory Stressor–Strain–Outcome (SSO), which reveals that when using social media, excess information acts as a stress trigger that causes tension in the form of psychological fatigue. This finding is also in line with research (Jha, 2019) which reveals that the sheer amount of information available can slow down and complicate the decision-making process for consumers.

The second hypothesis that information overload affects social media exhaustion is also accepted. College students often suffer from mental fatigue when they are exposed to too much information, especially on social media. This is consistent with research Zhang et al. (2016) which explains that information overload can cause social network fatigue due to the overflow of social demand that comes non-stop. Excess information causes users' cognitive resources to be drained, making them feel tired and hesitant to engage with social media.

The findings of the study further show that social media exhaustion has a positive effect on decision postponement. According to the study, excessive exposure to social media information can lead to burnout, which can interfere with judgment. When people are psychologically exhausted, they avoid or delay decision-making. These results are consistent with research Al-Youzbaky & Hanna (2022) suggests that social media fatigue influences online purchasing decisions.

The relationship between information overload and decision delay was significantly mediated by social media fatigue, according to the results of the mediation test. This shows that the impact of over information on delaying the decision to purchase is not only directly but indirectly through students' experiences of digital fatigue. According to SSO theory, stress triggers will result in tension, and our research has shown that this pathway is important. Research by (Fu et al., 2020) Supporting social media exhaustion is a key factor that bridges the negative effects of information exposure on purchasing decisions.

## CONCLUSION

The study's findings suggest that decision delays are strongly influenced by information overload, with social media fatigue as a mediating factor. Mental fatigue is common among students who are overinformed, which interferes with their ability to make quick and convincing decisions. These results show how social media fatigue plays an important role in triggering the effects of over information on decision-making and emphasize the importance of controlling exposure to social media information to reduce the cognitive and emotional burden that can lead to decision delays. The theoretical implications of this study support the stressor-tension-outcome (SSO) paradigm, which states that social media saturation is a strain caused by information overload, which ultimately results in decision delays. The results of this study also add a psychological component to the behavior of digital consumers and emphasize the important role played by social media fatigue as a mediator in the interaction between information overload and delay in choice. The results of the study emphasize how urgent it is to alleviate the emotional and cognitive tension caused by exposure to unfiltered information. From a managerial perspective, the study offers in-depth information that helps regional skincare companies create more sustainable, ethical, and focused digital marketing campaigns that serve the mental health of their student market.

The results of this study may not be fully generalizable to other age groups or demographics due to a number of constraints, including its emphasis on students who are digital-native audiences. Furthermore, this study only looked at the consequences of information overload in the context of social media; The study ignores other external variables such as economic or cultural circumstances that may influence consumers' decision to buy.

Future research is suggested to conduct longitudinal studies and expand the scope of the audience to include a larger age group. The impact of different types of information (such as social information versus promotional information) on decision delays and social media fatigue can also be further explored through research. A more comprehensive view of these dynamics can be obtained

by incorporating external variables, such as cultural and economic impacts, and increasing the use of other social media platforms.

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