

U.S. Apparel Consumers' Information Overload and Social Interaction on social media

Olabisi Adesanya, Yuan-Ting Wang and Jihyeong Son

Washington State University

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Introduction. The number of social media users continues to increase enormously. Over 50% of the world population uses social media, and 346 million new users were recorded in July 2020 (Chaffey, 2020). Social media provides a collaborative platform where users can interact with one another as well as with the shared content (Salkhordeh, 2010). With such a huge user base, it is no surprise that many companies, including apparel industries, use social media as one of their marketing tools for communication with consumers. However, the flood of advertisements on social media could affect its potency when the users are overwhelmed by the amount of information received (Fasolo et al., 2007). Due to limited knowledge on the impact of intense social media marketing (Rodriguez et al., 2014), this study aimed to examine the determinants of information overload and the impacts of information overload on consumers' social interaction with apparel brands in social media. The objectives of the study were to 1) assess the characteristics of information (relevance and equivocality) that impact information overload, 2) examine fashion consciousness that could moderate the users' perception of information overload, 3) examine the impact of information overload on social interaction among users on social media, 4) provide useful insights around social media marketing for scholars, retailers, and marketers.

Literature Review and Hypotheses. Information overload can be defined as a subjective description of an inability to process information received due to the overabundance of the shared information and leading to overwhelm for the receiver (Lin et al., 2020). Information overload occurs when the shared information can no longer be adequately processed by a receiver to facilitate a complete communication process, and the receiver becomes overwhelmed, frustrated, or avoids pursuing the action expected from the information. Information Relevance (IR) and Information Equivocality (IE) were found to influence information overload (Lee et al., 2016). Fashion information could be differently perceived for overload depending on the consumers' inclination towards apparel products (Nam et al., 2007). Therefore, fashion consciousness could moderate the effect of information overload on social media. Social media facilitates the maximization of exchanges of information and knowledge through social interaction (Razak et al. 2016).

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were developed for this study:

H1: *Information relevance is negatively related to information overload for fashion products on social media.*

H2: *Information equivocality is positively related to information overload for fashion and apparel products on social media.*

H3: Fashion consciousness moderates the effect of perceived (a)information relevance and (b)information equivocality on information overload for fashion products on social media.

H4: Consumers' perceived information overload for fashion products on social media is positively related to social interaction.

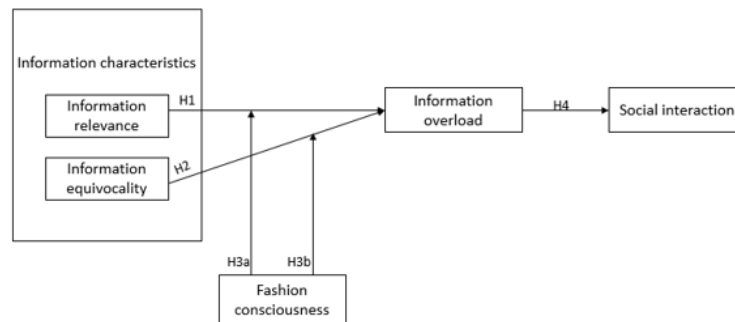


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model

Method. 322 usable U.S. consumer surveys were collected by Amazon MTurk. The respondents were 61.7% male and 38.3% female, and the mean age was 37. Most of the participants were white Caucasian (73.6%), married (55.9%), and had bachelor's degree (61.2%). In terms of using social media use to get information, 42.2% of the participants admitted using social media at least once a week, followed by 32.3% who use once or more in a day, then 13.7% who use once every two weeks, then 8.4% who use once a month, followed by 3.1% who use once every two months and then .3% use once every three months. Uni-dimensionality, reliability and validity of the investigated constructs were first tested to prove model adequacy (Byrne, 1998). Multiple and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test hypotheses. All the measurement items, adapted from previous studies were measured with a seven-point Likert scale with end points 1 as strongly disagree, and 7 as strongly agree.

Findings and Discussion. IR was negatively related to information overload for fashion products on social media ($\beta = -.296, t = -5.959, p < 0.001$), supporting H1. IE was positively related to information overload for fashion products on social media ($\beta = .487, t = 9.794, p < 0.001$), supporting H2. FC has a positive and significant moderating effect on the relationship between perceived IR and information overload for fashion products on social media ($\beta = .611, t = 7.084, p < 0.001$) but showed an insignificant moderating effect on the relationship between IE and information overload ($\beta = .199, t = 1.820, p < 0.001$). Thus, H3a is supported but H3b is not supported. Consumers' perceived information overload positively influence social interaction to for fashion products on social media ($\beta = .231, t = 4.234, p = 0.000$), not supporting H4.

Conclusion and Implications. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that apparel consumers do perceive information overload with respect to information on fashion products advertised on social media platforms. However, the direct positive relationship found between information overload and social interaction on social media for fashion product information suggests that users find the information enjoyable enough for continued interaction. In addition, fashion consciousness significantly and positively moderated the relationship between information

relevance and information overload. This finding implies that the fashion-conscious consumers are more likely to find information on fashion products important and relevant to them, and their perception of overload with the information becomes lowered or diminished. Finally, this study provides implications that a mutual relationship exists between information overload and social interaction on social media because of the positive relationship found between them. Therefore, retailers and marketers of fashion and apparel products could leverage on the strategies that would enable engagement with consumers to ease the overload felt on social media with respect to fashion and apparel product information.

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