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Information Overload as a Mediator in the Relationship Between Instagram's Social Media Use Intensity and Social Media Fatigue in Emerging Adulthood

Muhammad Aulia Sabarky
Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

Nugraha Arif Karyanta
Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

Fadjri Kirana Anggarani
Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia
Corresponding Author, fadjri.kirana@staff.uns.ac.id

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Abstract

The massive use of Instagram in Indonesia aligns with the high need for emerging adults to socialize and express themselves. This makes users face much information, making it vulnerable to causing social media fatigue. This study examines the role of the information overload variable as a mediator of the relationship between the intensity of social media use and social media fatigue in the emerging adult group. Respondents in this study were aged 18-25 years, including 145 men and 182 women. Data was collected using three scales: SONTUS Revised Version, Information Overload Scales, and the SMFS Scale, adapted into Indonesian. The collected data was tested using PROCESS Macro (Model 4) involving intermediary variables with the help of the SPSS Statistics 26.0 for Windows program. This study's results indicate a mediating effect of excess information in the relationship between the intensity of social media use and social media fatigue. Complete mediation occurs because the direct impact becomes insignificant when the extra information variable is added to the equation.

Introduction

The growth of social media in the last few decades has played a significant role in simplifying lives in modern times. This is proven in the We Are Social survey, which shows the total number of social media users has almost reached 4,2 billion worldwide (Bayu, 2021). Pew Research Center (2018) also reported increasing social media users in many countries, including Indonesia. Hootsuite, in their report titled Indonesia Digital 2021: The Latest Insights Into The State of Digital, showed that of 275 million Indonesia citizens, almost 170 million (61,8%) of them are active social media users (We Are Social, 2021). That amount is increasing by 10 million users (6,3%) compared to last year.

The increasing number of users is because of the massive social media use and has spread to various age groups, including emerging adulthood. According to Arnett (2015), emerging adulthood is an individual experiencing a developmental transition from adolescence to early adulthood, between 18 to 25 years old. In this emerging adulthood, social media is essential in fulfilling their need to socialize, explore self-identity, and build social relations with others (Arnett, 2007; Coyne et al., 2013). In Indonesia, emerging adulthood is one of the age groups known to use social media the most. Collected data from Hootsuite showed that 30,7% of social media users in Indonesia are from the ages 18-25 years old (We Are Social, 2021).

Amidst the emergence of various social media choices, Instagram became one of the most popular platforms for emerging adulthood groups. Based on collected data from NapoleonCat, most Instagram users in Indonesia, including the age group 18-25 years old, have a percentage of 37,2% (NapoleonCat, 2021). This platform enables users to take pictures using filters and share them on the platform itself (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Instagram use is also encouraged by quite diverse motives (Innova, 2016). Research titled Pictures Speak Louder than Words: Motivations for Using Instagram explained that there are five primary motives (both socially and psychologically) that could encourage an individual to use Instagram, such as doing social interaction, archiving, momentary escape, self-expression, and seeing other users life.

As social media, Instagram users are generally divided into active and passive users (Burke et al., 2010). Active users interact, facilitating a two-way process with other users (Verduyn et al., 2017). The interactions on Instagram are usually done by liking and commenting on other users' posts, sending private messages by direct message, or posting pictures and videos with captions or specific hashtags. On the contrary, passive users monitor other users' activities without involvement or direct interaction (Trifiro & Gerson, 2019).

Social media use, especially Instagram, can be explained by the Uses and Gratification Theory developed by Katz (1959), which says an individual tends to use specific social media to fulfill their needs (Katz & Foulkes, 1962). One of the specific needs in question is information seeking, which pushes an individual to seek information about other users and other relevant things around it (Whiting & Williams, 2013). On the other hand, unlimited access to information also can make an individual experiencing an information overload condition (Wang & Deng, 2022). In the Instagram context, all of the related activities with information seeking tend to make some users overwhelmed and fatigued. This phenomenon can be identified as social media fatigue.

Based on the previous explanation, the correlation between the three can be explained by the stressor, strain, and outcome (SSO) framework. Specifically, the term refers to the social media use factor that influences the individual psychological condition (strain), which will end with the outcome or individual responses (Fu et al., 2020). This means the intensity of social media use acts as the stressor, information overload as the strain, and social media fatigue as the outcome. Users who experience social media fatigue are prone to limiting their activity intensity and using social media more passively (Bright et al., 2015; Zhu & Bao, 2018). For example, Instagram users only scroll to view other profiles or posts without direct interaction, such as liking, commenting, or sharing other users' content (Verduyn et al., 2015).

Social media fatigue refers to the multidimensional subjective experience of users and consists of a few feelings, such as fatigue, disappointment, anger, boredom, lost interest, and decreased motivation (Ravindran et al., 2014). The level of social media fatigue that

the users feel is on a continuum. The continuum starts with a mild, temporary level on one end towards a much more heavy, persistent level on the other (Ravindran et al., 2014). Besides that, subjective experience makes a difference in the social media level between one user and another, even in similar situations (Malik et al., 2020). Previous studies have identified various factors as results of interactions between users with social media platforms (relational-level drivers) that can cause social media fatigue; one is the intensity of social media use.

The intensity of social media use can be interpreted as the quantity of interest and attention of an individual while using social media (Aziz, 2020). The quantity is related to the duration or frequency spent in an individual's activity or using the available facilities on social media in daily life (Olufadi, 2016). Various features and facilities are given by social media, making the users tend to spend much more time accessing social media. This condition exposes the users to all interactions and available social media content, so energy and attention are needed to deal with it (Maier et al., 2012). This means that users with a higher intensity of social media use have a bigger chance of experiencing social media fatigue (Luqman et al., 2017; Malik et al., 2020).

Excessive social media use can also inflict another negative effect on users self, like information overload. Information overload is a condition in which an individual is faced with a large amount of information that exceeds individual capacity when processing it (Farhoomand & Drury, 2002; Eppler & Mengis, 2004). An intensive use of social media exposes users to an extensive collection of information, so the users are prone to feel overwhelmed when processing information. In this research, information overload has the role of mediator (*intervening*) variable. The information overload's role as a mediator has already been identified by several previous research studies on internet and social media use, such as Beaudoin (2008) and Riaz & Qureshi (2019).

The spread of social media use, added with various platforms that accommodate users' needs, caused many researchers to research social media fatigue. Different from some of the previous research that has been done on various social media, whether in general (Cao & Sun, 2018; Dhir et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2020) or specific, such as WeChat (Niu et al., 2020); Facebook (Fu et al., 2020); dan Whatsapp (Malik et al., 2020), this research focuses on Instagram as the most widely used by the emerging adulthood in Indonesia. Aside from that, very little research on social media fatigue as the main topic becomes another strong reason to do this research.

Methodology

This research was done online towards Instagram active users between 18 and 25 years old, known as the emerging adulthood group. Besides that, the author also limited the research region to only DKI Jakarta Province by collecting respondents representing each of the municipalities in DKI Jakarta, such as West Jakarta, South Jakarta, East Jakarta, North Jakarta, and Central Jakarta. DKI Jakarta was chosen because it has the highest proportion of individuals that use the internet in Indonesia (BPS, 2019), with internet user penetration reaching 86,96% (APJII, 2023). Data retrieval is done with a disproportionate stratified random sampling technique. Data collection is done through Google Forms. The total of participants from each municipality is 352 people. Twenty-five data respondents had to abort because it did not fulfill the criteria, so the total number of data respondents that are processed is 327 people. Descriptive respondent data in detail can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Subject Characteristics (N = 352)

Subject Characteristics	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age *(Mean = 21,25; SD = 1,969)*		
18 years old	37	10,5
19 years old	40	11,4
20 years old	50	14,2
21 years old	57	16,2
22 years old	76	21,6
23 years old	43	12,2
24 years old	24	6,8
25 years old	25	7,1
Total	**352**	**100**
Gender		
Men	158	44,9
Women	194	55,1
Total	**352**	**100**
Domicile *(Mean = 2,87; SD = 1,411)*		
South Jakarta	82	23,3
West Jakarta	76	21,6
North Jakarta	61	17,3
East Jakarta	70	19,9
Central Jakarta	63	17,9
Total	**352**	**100**
Activities on Instagram *(Mean = 2,13; SD = 1,248)*		
Uploading Story or Feed	130	36,9
Giving Like or Comment	112	31,8
Sending Direct Message	32	9,1
Sharing Picture or Video	31	8,8
Checking Advertisement of a Product	26	7,4
Viewing Other User Profile	5	1,4
Scrolling the Homepage	16	4,5
Total	**352**	**100**
User Type		
Active User	341	96,9
Passive User	11	3,1
Total	**352**	**100**

Duration of Use *(Mean = 3,31; SD = 1,898)*		
1 hour	56	15,9
2 hours	96	27,3
3 hours	66	18,8
4 hours	45	12,8
5 hours	40	11,4
6 hours	26	7,4
7 hours	7	2,0
8 hours	16	4,5
Total	**352**	**100**

The data in this research was collected using three scales: (1) Intensity of Social Media Use Scale (17 items, α = 0.92), adapted to Bahasa Indonesia from Social Networking Time Use Scale (SONTUS) Revised Version by Alhaytami (2020); (2) Information Overload Scale (8 items, α = 0,83), adapted to Bahasa Indonesia from Information Overload Scale by Nawaz et al. (2018); and (3) Social Media Fatigue Scale (15 items, α = 0,90), adapted to Bahasa Indonesia from Social Media Fatigue Scale (SMFS) by Zhang et al. (2021). Likert model with five answers choices is chosen in the intensity of social media use scale consisting of never (TP), rarely (J), occasionally (KK), very often (SS), and always (S), while information overload scale and social media fatigue scale are using Likert model with seven answers choices consist of strongly disagree (STS), disagree (TS), somewhat disagree (ATS), neutral (N), agree (S), strongly agree (SS).

This research hypothesis is tested using PROCESS Macro v4.1, developed by Hayes (2013). PROCESS Macro v4.1 is an extension in SPSS that was used to indirectly analyze mediation roles in the correlation between the independent and dependent variables. This research uses a simple mediation model with one intermediate variable. PROCESS Macro tested three equations: independent variable and mediator variable, independent variable and mediator variable with dependent variable, and independent variable with dependent variable.

Results and Discussion

The analysis showed that the intensity of social media use can directly affect social media fatigue and indirectly affect the intensity of social media use to information overload (as a mediator) and towards social media fatigue. The amount of direct effect is 0,018, while indirect effect is 0,338. Figure 1 shows the PROCESS mediation analysis model used as the base analysis procedure. The analysis results with PROCESS Macro v.4.1 can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3.

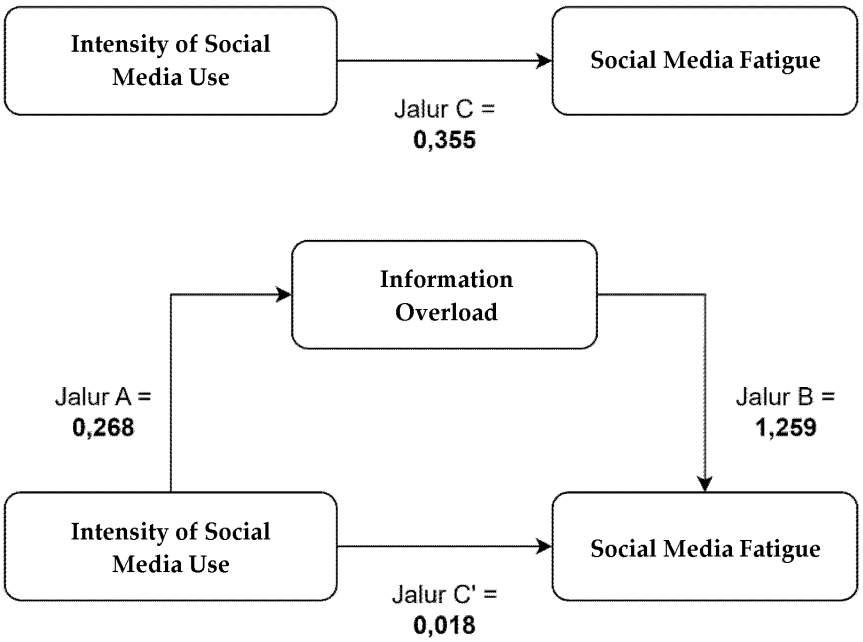

Figure 1. Mediation Analysis Model by PROCESS

Table 2. Mediation Analysis Result by PROCESS

Path	B (coeff.)	SE	Sig.	LLCI	ULCI
Direct Effect of Intensity of Social Media Use > Social Media Fatigue (C-path)	0,355	0,069	0,000	0,219	0,491
Intensity of Social Media > Information Overload (A-path)	0,268	0,040	0,000	0,189	0,347
Information Overload > Social Media Fatigue (B-path)	1,259	0,065	0,000	1,130	1,388
Indirect Effect of Intensity of Social Media Use > Social Media Fatigue, controlling Information Overload (C'-path)	0,018	0,050	0,728	-0,082	0,117

Table 3. Role of Effects Summary

Effect Type	B	SE	LLCI	ULCI	%
Indirect Effect	0,338	0,049	0,243	0,437	95,21
Direct Effect	0,018	0,050	-0,082	0,117	5,07
Total Effect	0,355	0,069	0,219	0,491	100,0

B Value on the a-path is 0,268, and the b-path is 1,259, wherein the two values show a significant result (sig < 0,05) and can be concluded that there is an influence of information overload mediation to the correlation between the intention of social media use and social media fatigue. Aside from that, indirect effects (B = 0,338; SE = 0,049) also significantly affect the confidence interval (CI) range between 0,243 to 0,437, which does not include zero value between LLCI and ULCI. The effect is complete mediation because the direct effect (B = 0,018; SE = 0,050) is not significant after adding the information overload to the equation

(sig > 0,05). That result also shows the indirect effect of the intensity of social media fatigue with information overload as the mediator has a more significant role (95,21%) in total effect than direct effect (5,07%).

Further mediation analysis continued to identify the emergence of the information overload mediation effect based on a few subject characteristics, like gender and duration of use. The analysis result can be seen in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4. Mediation Analysis Based on Gender

Men (N = 145)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	0,375	0,071	*Significant*	**0,235**	**0,518**
Direct Effect	0,017	0,077	**0,824**	-0,135	0,169
Total Effect	0,392	0,105	0,000	0,185	0,599
Women (N = 182)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	0,311	0,067	*Significant*	**0,179**	**0,445**
Direct Effect	0,012	0,067	**0,853**	-0,119	0,144
Total Effect	0,324	0,092	0,001	0,142	0,505

Table 5. Mediation Analysis Based on Duration of Use

1 Hour (N = 50)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	0,424	0,134	Sig.	**0,168**	**0,693**
Direct Effect	-0,098	0,154	**0,529**	-0,409	0,213
Total Effect	0,326	0,168	0,059	-0,012	0,665
2 Hours (N = 91)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	0,326	0,115	Sig.	**0,102**	**0,548**
Direct Effect	-0,063	0,107	**0,557**	-0,276	0,150
Total Effect	0,263	0,158	0,099	-0,050	0,577
3 Hours (N = 62)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	0,328	0,119	Sig.	**0,103**	**0,570**
Direct Effect	0,050	0,104	**0,635**	-0,158	0,258
Total Effect	0,377	0,154	0,017	0,069	0,686
4 Hours (N = 42)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	0,426	0,153	Sig.	**0,179**	**0,768**
Direct Effect	0,028	0,162	**0,863**	-0,299	0,355
Total Effect	0,454	0,206	0,033	0,039	0,870
5 Hours (N = 34)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**

Indirect Effect	0,389	0,213	*Unsig.*	**-0,004**	**0,505**
Direct Effect	-0,025	0,156	**0,874**	-0,343	0,293
Total Effect	0,364	0,258	0,169	-0,163	0,890
6 Hours (N = 25)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	0,328	0,177	*Unsig.*	**0,072**	**0,748**
Direct Effect	0,251	0,174	**0,163**	-0,110	0,612
Total Effect	0,579	0,200	0,008	0,164	0,993
7 Hours (N = 7)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	0,163	0,913	*Unsig.*	**-2,025**	**1,330**
Direct Effect	0,106	0,412	**0,810**	-1,040	1,252
Total Effect	0,269	0,415	0,544	-0,798	1,337
8 Hours (N = 16)					
	B	**SE**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Indirect Effect	-0,354	0,435	*Unsig.*	**-0,651**	**1,092**
Direct Effect	-0,354	0,460	**0,455**	-1,347	0,639
Total Effect	-0,029	0,592	0,962	-1,298	1,241

The mediation analysis that was conducted on each group of gender shows there is a complete mediation effect from the information overload variable on the correlation between the intensity of social media use and social media fatigue on men respondent group (B = 0.375; LLCI = 0.235; ULCI = 0.518) or women respondent group (B = 0.311; LLCI = 0.179; ULCI = 0.445). Furthermore, the mediation analysis on each group's duration of Instagram use shows a full mediation effect of information overload on the correlation between the intensity of social media use and social media fatigue in groups of users 1 to 4 hours of use.

The analysis revealed that information overload mediates the correlation between the intensity of social media use and social media fatigue. This parallels the previous research by Kamal et al. (2020) that proposes that information overload has a role in mediating the indirect correlation between the intensity of social media use and social media fatigue users. The increasing intensity of social media use, especially on the Instagram platform, was pushed by the individual need to have a relationship with other users. Emerging adulthood groups explicitly use Instagram to share content or casually socialize (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

In the emerging adulthood group, Instagram becomes a place to fulfill the need to socialize and obtain relevant information about the user's life. This is confirmed by Luqman et al. (2017), who explained that social media is used to fulfill social needs (social use), gain entertainment or enjoyment (hedonic use), or gather information (cognitive use). When a social media platform gives much convenience and benefits suitable to the users' needs, it will make someone spend more time using social media, especially Instagram. This is in line with the Technology Acceptance Model Theory by Davis (1989), which proposes that the usefulness and ease of use of social media affect the intensity of use by each user.

The intensity of social media use different for each individual can be reviewed using the Use and Gratification Theory, wherein theory explains that the amount of time spent on social media is pushed because there is a specific need that has to be fulfilled by the user (Olufadi,

2016). In this case, the social media Instagram was used to fulfill the social interaction need, gain the latest information, and a medium to make or share content, so the user was encouraged to spend more time on that platform.

The increasing intensity of use on the Instagram platform caused the user to be exposed to a large amount of information and ended with information overload (Karr-Winiewski & Lu, 2010; Whelan et al., 2020). Information overload makes the user face information beyond their capabilities to process. In this condition, users can feel overwhelmed when they have to understand, process, and separate the relevant and essential information to themself. This is also in line with research conducted by Laato et al. (2020), which explained that intensive social media use can make users experience information overload. The information overload that the users have experienced is exposed to a large amount of information (Whelan et al., 2020). Various information is plastered all over Instagram, requiring the users to spend more time and energy extracting essential and relevant information (Yu et al., 2018).

In this research, information overload experienced by users, especially the emerging adulthood group, made it difficult for them to process all the forms of information displayed on Instagram. Even more, the increasing number of Instagram users in the last few years is directly proportional to the growth of information flow quantitatively (Dai et al., 2020). The information is from features Instagram presents, such as stories, home, or explore. When users seek certain content, they probably find too much complex and irrelevant information to their needs overwhelm them in processing it (Jiang & Beaudoin, 2016; Barrett et al., 2021).

Information overload experienced by social media users can also be caused by a few things, like diversity, complexity, and novelty of information; the existence of social media features that burden the user's information; and limited time to analyze or understand the available information (Hoq, 2014; Bawden, 2020). This can cause an 'information explosion,' which makes the users have difficulty understanding the information, culminating in negative feelings known as social media fatigue. Liu et al. (2021) also add that emerging adulthood is more prone to experience information overload because of the inadequate information capability process to face the vital flow of circulating information.

In this research context, the higher social media use of Instagram increases the possibility of the user being exposed to various activities and interactions. This could encourage the users to spend more energy and time in a condition known as social media fatigue (Maier et al., 2012; Dhir et al., 2018). Subjective social media fatigue affects each user differently, such as being temporarily inactive or permanently deactivated. This is prone to causing the users to feel various negative emotions, like frustration and burnout (Zheng & Ling, 2021).

Besides that, the mediation analysis is also conducted based on respondent characteristics, which are gender and duration of use. The mediation analysis result shows there is a consistent mediation effect on each of the gender groups, either with men or women. The consistent mediation effect from information overload on each gender group is in line with Karr-Wisniewski et al. (2010) research, which explains that gender did not show a significant differential in information overload that has been experienced.

Men and women, especially at a younger age, can experience information overload because there is a high need to use Instagram to build relations and explore self-identity (Coyne et al., 2013). Both have the same chance to face the vital flow of information that can cause an information overload. Moreover, young men or women tend to experience information overload caused by a lack of time to understand information deeply (Misra & Stokols, 2012). In line with that, other research also explains that the younger group is more prone to experience information overload because of the inadequate capability to organize all of the information they have to process, which is plastered on social media. Hence,

users struggle to prioritize the information they must understand (Cabral, 2011).

This result is slightly different from the mediation analysis result based on the Instagram use duration. The analysis shows that mediation only happened during 1-4 hours of Instagram use; otherwise, 5-8 hours of Instagram use did not show a mediating effect from information overload. This result is not in line with previous research by Laato et al. (2020), which proposes that the high intensity of social media use is prone to cause an information overload condition to the users. This can be caused by a few factors, one of which is the diversity, complexity, or novelty of the information that each user accepts (Bawden, 2020).

Diverse and complex information can trigger information overload because users must release considerable cognitive effort to process the information. Of course, this result possibly can answer the inconsistency of the previous analysis result. Users with a lower duration of Instagram use probably obtain a bunch of new information, much more complex and diverse compared to users with a higher duration of Instagram use; however, gaining a bunch of familiar information is much easier to understand and relevant to users' selves. The difference in information that goes through users is caused by the Instagram algorithm, which differs for each user. This also can determine the information reach, either broader, complex, and diverse information or information that's relevant and easy to understand by the users (Mikolajczyk & McLachlan, 2022).

This research result is expected to become a reference or another point of view for future research that will be conducted with a similar theme or topic. Hopefully, future researchers can fix this limitation by identifying other independent variables (such as social comparison, self-disclosure, etc) and broadening the sample research reach to other cities or islands in Indonesia. Furthermore, other researchers in Indonesia are expected to develop a Bahasa Indonesia measuring instrument on information overload variables and social media fatigue to facilitate the other researchers' use of the scales.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that all of the hypotheses are fulfilled and show the total mediation influence indirectly between the intensity of social media use and social media fatigue on emerging adults who use Instagram. Complete mediation happens because the correlation between the intensity of social media use and social media fatigue (direct effect) becomes insignificant when adding information overload to the equation.

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