

A Study on the Mechanism of How Perceived Information Overload Affects Behavioral Intentions among E-Commerce Platform Users

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Abstract: Based on the SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theoretical framework, this study explores the underlying logic and mechanisms linking users' perceived information overload, cognitive and psychological responses, and behavioral intentions. The results indicate the following: First, cognitive and psychological responses consist of three dimensions—cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety—while behavioral intentions consist of two dimensions—users' intention to purchase products and their intention to continue using the app. Second, perceived information overload significantly inhibits users' intention to purchase products and their intention to continue using the app. Third, users' cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety mediate the relationship between perceived information overload and users' intention to purchase products and their intention to continue using the app. This study provides theoretical foundations and practical insights for e-commerce platforms to optimize recommendation strategies and alleviate users' cognitive burden.

Keywords: E-commerce; Information overload; Decision-making intentions; Structural equation modeling; SOR model

Online publication: July 28, 2026

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of high-quality development in the global digital economy, personalized recommendation algorithms have become the core engine driving precise supply-demand matching on e-commerce platforms worldwide. However, the vast amount of information generated by intelligent emergence is a double-edged sword: while enriching the global supply of goods and information, it also subjects consumers in algorithmic environments to unprecedented information overload. This excessive strain on users' cognitive resources and the continuous intensification of psychological burdens are posing a common and urgent challenge to the global digital consumer ecosystem. Perceived information overload has emerged as a critical issue at the intersection of digital marketing and consumer behavior. Therefore, a systematic analysis of the causes, consequences, and intervention mechanisms of perceived overload holds significant theoretical value and practical significance.

User behavioral intent is a core metric for measuring a platform's commercial performance and user retention, and it directly impacts the platform's long-term growth potential. Regarding recommendation systems

and information overload, existing research has developed two relatively independent lines of inquiry: on the one hand, research on recommendation systems has largely focused on their positive effects, examining their beneficial impact on user purchasing behavior and satisfaction ^[1]; on the other hand, research on information overload reveals the negative consequences of “information overload,” such as the “paradox of choice” proposed by Schwartz ^[2] and the empirical examination of the relationship between information overload and the purchasing experience by Bi and Jia ^[3]. However, most existing studies have examined these two phenomena in isolation, paying insufficient attention to the connection that “recommendation systems themselves are a significant source of information overload.” This makes it difficult for the existing literature to explain how recommendation systems influence users’ behavioral intentions through information overload; it also hinders the provision of adequate theoretical and practical guidance for e-commerce platforms to optimize recommendation designs and guide positive user behavior.

To address the aforementioned gap, this study introduces the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. Focusing on users of mainstream Chinese e-commerce platforms, the study links the perceived information overload with users’ psychological and cognitive responses, thereby revealing the pathways through which these factors influence behavioral intentions (including purchase intent and intent to continue using the app). The central research question is: Does perceived information overload significantly influence users’ behavioral intentions through the mediating role of psychological and cognitive reactions? The findings reveal that perceived information overload inhibits users’ behavioral intentions by inducing cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety. Both its direct and indirect effects are significant, and psychological and cognitive reactions play a partial mediating role.

This study makes potential contributions in three areas. First, it extends the application of the SOR theory to digital consumption contexts. This study reveals the transmission pathway through which perceived information overload influences users’ behavioral intentions via cognitive and psychological responses, providing empirical evidence to support platforms in balancing operational strategies between information richness and users’ cognitive load.

Second, it clarifies the relative effects of multiple psychological and cognitive mediating variables. By simultaneously incorporating cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety as parallel mediators and comparing their effects, this study found that decision difficulty is the key bottleneck inhibiting behavioral intention, providing empirical guidance for identifying critical targets for psychological interventions. Third, the study proposes a differentiated design strategy for recommendation systems. Contrary to the notion that “information overload is universally harmful,” this research suggests that platforms can transform users’ decision difficulty into positive cognitive engagement through moderate selection support features (such as multidimensional comparisons and intelligent filtering), thereby enhancing purchase conversion rates and user retention.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the hypotheses; Section 3 outlines the research design; Section 4 analyzes the empirical results; and Section 5 presents the conclusions and implications.

2. Research hypotheses

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, proposed by Mehrabian and Russell ^[4], breaks down the behavioral generation process into three core components: Stimulus refers to various factors in the external environment that act upon the individual; Organism refers to internal changes in the individual’s cognition and emotions; Response refers to the external behavior or behavioral intention exhibited by the individual. This model suggests that behavior is not a simple reflex to the environment but rather the result of psychological

mechanisms. In the field of e-commerce, it is widely applied because it clearly reveals the “technology-psychology-behavior” transmission pathway.

2.1. Perceived information overload and psychological and cognitive responses

In scenarios where mobile shopping and personalized recommendations are deeply integrated into daily consumption, users are exposed to a vast amount of product information and frequent recommendation notifications. The volume or speed of the information received exceeds their information-processing capacity, gradually leading individuals into a state of information overload, known as perceived information overload. This state of overload has a significant positive impact on consumer confusion and decision-making delay, with consumer confusion playing a significant mediating role between information overload and decision-making delay^[5]; Information overload and communication overload have a significant positive impact on online fatigue, and both indirectly influence platform switching behavior through online fatigue and switching intention^[6]. Based on this, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Information overload has a significant positive effect on users’ psychological and cognitive responses (cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety).

2.2. Psychological and cognitive responses and user behavioral intentions

Users’ cognitive resources and psychological capacity are limited. Empirical research has demonstrated that the negative psychological states induced by information overload influence users’ behavioral intentions.

Regarding cognitive fatigue, existing research has shown that perceptual overload has a significant positive effect on user fatigue, which in turn negatively affects purchase intention^[7]. Furthermore, the problem of information overload has become increasingly prominent in the era of e-commerce, exerting a negative impact on consumers’ psychology^[8]. Regarding decision difficulties, an overabundance of information and choices significantly increases the difficulty of decision-making, drains cognitive resources, and results in decision fatigue, consequently causing adverse consumer responses including postponed buying and weaker purchase willingness^[2]. Simultaneously, an excessive number of product options can lead to consumer choice overload, which in turn negatively affects purchase intention^[9]. Regarding psychological anxiety, anxiety—as an emotional barrier—is a significant negative predictor of customers’ intention to use mobile phones^[10], and anxiety and stress can also lead users to develop ambivalent attitudes, causing them to tend to avoid consumption^[11]. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Psychological and cognitive reactions (cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, psychological anxiety) have a significant negative impact on users’ behavioral intentions (intention to purchase products, intention to continue using the app).

2.3. Perceived information overload and user behavioral intentions

Regarding user behavioral intentions, information that exceeds users’ processing capacity can have negative effects, thereby adversely affecting their purchase intentions and willingness to use the app. Existing research indicates that information overload from social media influencers has a significant positive impact on consumer purchase avoidance^[12]; information redundancy exerts a negative impact on user satisfaction and users’ continuous intention to use e-commerce platforms^[13]. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Information overload has a significant negative impact on users’ behavioral intentions (intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app).

Drawing on the SOR theory, information overload, as an external environmental stimulus, may, on the one hand, directly exert a certain degree of negative influence on users’ behavioral intentions; on the other hand, it

may indirectly inhibit users' behavioral intentions through three mediating pathways: cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety. Information overload exerts a positive influence on cognitive dissonance; post-purchase cognitive dissonance typically significantly reduces users' psychological satisfaction and intention to continue using the platform^[3]; Perceived information overload directly affects fatigue, frustration, and dissatisfaction among social media users, thereby affecting their information avoidance intention^[14]. Based on the above theories, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Psychological and cognitive reactions (cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, psychological anxiety) mediate the effect of perceived information overload on users' behavioral intentions (intention to purchase products, intention to continue using the app).

In summary, the impact mechanism model developed in this study is shown in **Figure 1**.

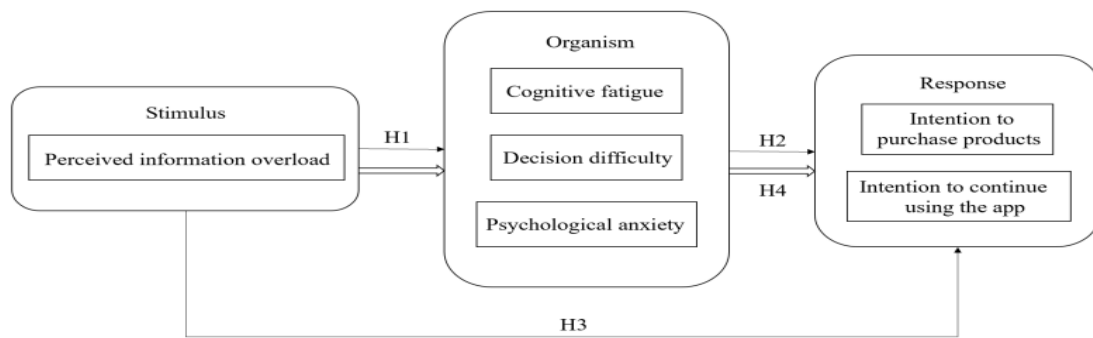


Figure 1. Mechanism model

3. Research design

3.1. Research methods and data sources

3.1.1. Research methods

This study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to investigate the underlying relationships among perceived information overload, psychological and cognitive reactions (cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety), and user behavioral intentions (intention to purchase a product and intention to continue using the app). SEM comprises measurable observed variables and latent variables that cannot be directly measured, and consists of a measurement model and a structural model. Equations (1) and (2) constitute the measurement model, reflecting the factor loadings between latent variables and their observed variables; Equation (3) constitutes the structural model, reflecting the causal relationships among latent variables.

$$X = \Lambda_x \zeta + \delta \quad (1)$$

$$Y = \Lambda_y \eta + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

$$\eta = B\eta + \Gamma \xi + \mu \quad (3)$$

In this model, ξ represents the exogenous latent variable and η represents the endogenous latent variables, X and Y denote the observed variables of ξ and η , respectively. Λ_x is the factor loading matrix between the exogenous observed variable X and the exogenous latent variable ξ , Λ_y is the factor loading matrix between the endogenous observed variable Y and the endogenous latent variable η . B is the influence coefficient matrix between endogenous latent variables, Γ is the influence coefficient matrix between the exogenous latent

variable ξ and the endogenous latent variable η . δ and ε represent the measurement errors of X and Y respectively, μ represents the residual term of the structural model, reflecting the portion of η that is not explained by the model.

To comprehensively test the hypotheses, this study constructed two structural equation models for separate estimation. Model 1 (Overall Mediation Model) treats perceived information overload as an exogenous latent variable, psychological and cognitive reactions (comprising the three dimensions of cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety) as mediating variables, and user behavioral intentions (comprising the two dimensions of intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app) as outcome variables, to examine the overall transmission pathways among these three factors. Model 2 (Segmented Mediation Model): Treats the three mediating variables (cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety) and the two outcome variables (intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app) as independent latent variables. It examines the effects of perceived information overload on each mediating variable, the effects of each mediating variable on the outcome variables, and the mediation effects.

3.1.2. Data sources

The data for this study were collected through an online survey. The survey was designed and distributed primarily via the Wenjuanxing platform, and its reach and demographic diversity were further expanded through various channels, including WeChat and referrals from friends. A total of 324 surveys were distributed; after excluding 23 invalid responses, 301 valid responses were collected, resulting in a response rate of 93%. Descriptive statistical analysis of the sample structure was conducted across three dimensions: age, gender, and average monthly online spending. In terms of gender distribution, there were 162 male respondents and 139 female respondents, indicating a generally balanced gender ratio. Regarding age distribution, the sample was primarily concentrated in the 18–35 age range, with lower proportions of respondents under 18 and over 35. Overall, the age structure aligns with the age characteristics of mainstream e-commerce platform users. In terms of average monthly online spending, the distribution of spending levels was relatively dispersed: the largest group of respondents spent between 1,001 and 2,000 yuan, followed by those spending between 101 and 500 yuan, over 2,000 yuan, and under 100 yuan. The smallest proportion of respondents was in the 501–1,000 yuan range. The spending amounts cover all tiers from low to high, comprehensively reflecting the behavioral differences among users with varying purchasing power in personalized recommendation scenarios.

3.2. Variable and questionnaire scale design

3.2.1. Perceived information overload

Drawing on the research by Dai *et al.* ^[14], this study measures perceived information overload based on five dimensions: volume of information, repetition of information, confusion of information, update frequency, and relevance of information. See **Table 1** for details.

Table 1. Items for measuring perceived information overload

Concept	Item number	Item content
Perceived Information Overload	PIO1	The platform recommends too many products or pieces of information to me
	PIO2	The recommended content contains a lot of duplicate information
	PIO3	Recommendations in different contexts (such as search pages and product detail pages) are confusing
	PIO4	The recommendations are updated too frequently, and I can't keep up with them.
	PIO5	The recommended content is irrelevant to my current needs, which wastes my time

3.2.2. Psychological and cognitive responses

Drawing on studies by Kusi *et al.* ^[15], this study comprehensively evaluated the attributes of the variables and adjusted them to suit the specific context. Ultimately, we measured users' psychological and cognitive responses in information-overload situations using a total of nine items across three dimensions: cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety. See **Table 2** for details.

Table 2. Items for measuring psychological and cognitive responses

Concept	Item number	Item content
Cognitive Fatigue	PF1	I find the constant stream of recommendations exhausting.
	PF2	After browsing through a large amount of recommended content, I feel drained.
	PF3	I find browsing through recommendations mentally taxing.
Decision Difficulty	DD1	When faced with so many options, I have a hard time comparing their pros and cons.
	DD2	With so many choices, I struggle to make a purchasing decision.
	DD3	It's difficult to find a satisfactory choice among so many recommendations.
Psychological Anxiety	PA1	When there are too many recommendations, I get frustrated.
	PA2	I feel anxious about missing out on good recommendations.
	PA3	I get bored when the recommended content keeps updating.

3.2.3. User behavioral intentions

Drawing on the research by Agnihotri *et al.* ^[12], and further incorporating the researchers' long-term experience and observations of consumer behavior while shopping on e-commerce platforms, this study ultimately measures users' behavioral intentions under information overload using six items across two dimensions: intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app. See **Table 3** for details.

Table 3. Items for measuring user behavioral intentions

Concept	Item number	Item content
Intention to Purchase Products	PI1	Too many recommendations reduce my willingness to purchase the recommended items.
	PI2	I may decide not to buy an item because I have trouble making a choice.
	PI3	Seeing the same recommendations repeatedly reduces my willingness to buy.
Intention to Continue Using the APP	CI1	Receiving a large volume of recommendations over a long period may lead me to uninstall the platform's app.
	CI2	If the recommendations aren't accurate enough, I'll reduce how often I shop on the platform.
	CI3	An overly complex recommendation system will cause me to use the platform less frequently.

4. Analysis of empirical results

4.1. Reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis

First, the internal consistency of the scale was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. The results showed that the overall Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire scale was 0.906, with coefficients for all variables at 0.869, 0.818, 0.824, 0.783, 0.792, and 0.826, respectively—all greater than 0.7. This indicates that the scale used in this study has a good level of reliability. Second, the study conducted confirmatory factor analysis on the scales of each variable, yielding test results for model fit, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The results showed that the model had a relatively good fit. The study further examined the average convergent validity

(AVE) and composite reliability (CR) of each dimension of the scale. The results showed that the square roots of the AVE for each variable were greater than the corresponding correlation coefficients, indicating good discriminant validity among the variables.

4.2. Main effect tests

First, to test whether Hypothesis H1 holds, this study constructed a structural equation model with psychological and cognitive reactions as dependent variables and perceived information overload as the independent variable. The results revealed that the effect of perceived information overload on psychological and cognitive reactions was significantly positive at the 1% level. The study further constructed a structural equation model with cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety as dependent variables and perceived information overload as the independent variable. The results revealed that the effects of perceived information overload on cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety were all significantly positive at the 1% level, confirming Hypothesis H1.

Subsequently, to test Hypothesis H2, this study constructed a structural equation model with user behavioral intention as the dependent variable and psychological and cognitive reactions as the independent variables. The results showed that the effect of psychological and cognitive reactions on user behavioral intention was significantly negative at the 1% level. The study further constructed a structural equation model with intention to purchase the product and intention to continue using the app as dependent variables, and cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety as independent variables. The results showed that the standardized regression coefficients for all paths were negative, and all *P*-values were less than 0.05, confirming Hypothesis H2.

To test Hypothesis H3, this study constructed a structural equation model with user behavioral intentions as the dependent variable and perceived information overload as the independent variable. The results showed that the effect of perceived information overload on user behavioral intentions was significantly negative at the 5% level. The study further constructed a structural equation model with intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app as dependent variables and perceived information overload as the independent variable. The results indicate that the effect of perceived information overload on both product purchase intention and app continued usage intention is significantly negative at the 1% level, confirming Hypothesis H3.

In summary, perceived information overload can negatively impact users' intention to purchase products and continue using the app. Psychological and cognitive reactions such as cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety can also inhibit users' intention to purchase products and continue using the app. The results are shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Path coefficients and test results for main effects

X	→	Y	Standardized regression coefficient	SE	CR value	<i>P</i>	Hypothetical results
Perceived Information Overload	→	Psychological and Cognitive Responses	0.544***	0.061	7.096	0.000	H1 Established
Perceived Information Overload	→	Cognitive Fatigue	0.442***	0.066	6.471	0.000	

Perceived Information Overload	→	Decision Difficulty	0.589***	0.067	8.454	0.000	
Perceived Information Overload	→	Psychological Anxiety	0.432***	0.069	6.117	0.000	
Psychological and Cognitive Responses	→	User Behavioral Intentions	-0.730***	0.091	6.342	0.000	H2 Established
Cognitive Fatigue	→	Intention to Purchase Products	-0.318***	0.065	4.506	0.000	
Cognitive Fatigue	→	Intention to Continue Using the APP	-0.229***	0.058	3.583	0.000	
Decision Difficulty	→	Intention to Purchase Products	-0.345***	0.067	4.791	0.000	
Decision Difficulty	→	Intention to Continue Using the APP	-0.477***	0.067	6.549	0.000	
Psychological Anxiety	→	Intention to Purchase Products	-0.176**	0.063	2.551	0.011	
Psychological Anxiety	→	Intention to Continue Using the APP	-0.204***	0.058	3.150	0.002	
Perceived Information Overload	→	User Behavioral Intentions	-0.129**	0.041	1.984	0.047	H3 Established
Perceived Information Overload	→	Intention to Purchase Products	-0.426***	0.072	5.982	0.000	
Perceived Information Overload	→	Intention to Continue Using the APP	-0.476***	0.067	6.594	0.000	

* $P < 0.1$, ** $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.01$

4.3. Testing the mediating effects of psychological and cognitive responses

This study further examined the mediating roles of cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety in the relationship between perceived information overload and both intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app. A structural equation model was constructed with perceived information overload as the independent variable, cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety as mediating variables, and intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app as dependent variables. The Bootstrap method was employed, the results are presented in **Table 5**.

The results show that the mediating effects of cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety are all significant and negative. After controlling for the mediating variables, the effects of perceived information overload on both intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app were significantly negative at the 1% level. This indicates that cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety all played partial mediating roles. The path with psychological and cognitive reactions as a higher-order mediator was also significant, confirming Hypothesis H4.

Table 5. Results of the mediation analysis

Item	Mediation effect size	Boot SE	Z value	P	95% BootCI	Conclusion
Perceived Information Overload => Psychological and Cognitive Responses => User Behavioral Intentions	-0.239***	0.037	6.525	0.000	-0.311~-0.168	Partial mediation
Perceived Information Overload => Cognitive Fatigue => Intention to Purchase Products	-0.079***	0.026	3.055	0.002	-0.133~-0.032	Partial mediation
Perceived Information Overload => Decision Difficulty => Intention to Purchase Products	-0.104***	0.033	3.093	0.002	-0.174~-0.042	Partial mediation
Perceived Information Overload => Psychological Anxiety => Intention to Purchase Products	-0.038*	0.020	1.921	0.055	-0.082~-0.004	Partial mediation
Perceived Information Overload => Cognitive Fatigue => Intention to Continue Using the APP	-0.060**	0.025	2.408	0.016	-0.117~-0.018	Partial mediation
Perceived Information Overload => Decision Difficulty => Intention to Continue Using the APP	-0.169***	0.041	4.128	0.000	-0.253~-0.092	Partial mediation
Perceived Information Overload => Psychological Anxiety => Intention to Continue Using the APP	-0.051**	0.024	2.117	0.034	-0.104~-0.009	Partial mediation

* $P < 0.1$, ** $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.01$

5. Conclusion and implications

Based on the SOR theoretical framework, this study employed structural equation modeling and Bootstrap mediation analysis to thoroughly investigate the underlying relationships and causal pathways among perceived information overload, psychological and cognitive responses, and user behavioral intentions. The main conclusions are as follows:

First, psychological and cognitive reactions consist of three dimensions: cognitive fatigue, decision difficulty, and psychological anxiety; user behavioral intentions consist of two dimensions: intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app. Second, perceived information overload significantly inhibits users' intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app. The higher the level of perceived information overload, the lower the users' intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app. Third, psychological and cognitive reactions partially mediate the relationship between perceived information overload and users' behavioral intentions. Information overload indirectly inhibits users' intention to purchase products and intention to continue using the app by inducing the aforementioned three psychological states.

Based on the findings of the above study, the following practical recommendations are proposed: First, strictly control the density of recommended content to mitigate the risk of information overload at its source. Platforms should limit the consolidation of duplicate content and provide user-adjustable recommendation frequencies to prevent information overload. Second, optimize recommendation strategies tailored to user demographics. Platforms can reduce the number of options, provide multi-dimensional filtering tools, and introduce a "minimalist recommendation mode" to prevent the excessive accumulation of fatigue. Third, establish a dynamic monitoring and tiered intervention mechanism for users' psychological states. Platforms can utilize user behavior logs (such as dwell time and bounce rate) to identify signs of fatigue and dynamically

reduce recommendation density to maintain a balance between user experience and conversion rates.

This study also has several limitations: First, the sample has limited representativeness. The sample consists primarily of frequent online shoppers, with insufficient coverage of infrequent users such as the elderly; therefore, the external validity of the conclusions remains to be verified. Second, cross-sectional data make it difficult to infer causality. Since all variables were measured at a single point in time, it is impossible to completely rule out the influence of reverse causality or omitted variables. Future research could further address these issues.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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