

# The influence of social media news overload on news avoidance and filtering in Generation Z: A PLS-SEM study

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media news overload on the news consumption behaviors of Generation Z users in Vietnam, emphasizing the roles of news efficacy, affective load, and social filtering. Users have to deal with too much information on social media, which can make them tired and want to stay away from the news. By integrating Cognitive Load Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, this research explores how news overload influences news avoidance and filtering behaviors. The study proposes that increased news overload exacerbates news avoidance through heightened affective load and diminished news efficacy. Furthermore, it examines how the perception that “news finds me” moderates this relationship. The study utilizes a stratified random sampling technique, surveying 1,224 participants, and employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) for data analysis. The results confirm that news overload significantly leads to news avoidance and social filtering, with news efficacy playing a crucial mediating role. The results show how important it is to come up with ways to control how much news people read and to help them process information better. This means that social media platforms should provide personalized content to mitigate the negative effects of overload, such as filtering out irrelevant news and highlighting important updates based on user preferences. The study enhances comprehension of news

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avoidance behaviors in the digital era and offers insights into how social media users can navigate information overload.

## **Keywords**

News overload, news avoidance, news efficacy, news filtering, Generation Z.

## **Introduction**

The way younger people acquire their news has changed a lot in the last few years, mostly because of the rise of social media. These platforms have become the main places to obtain news about politics, current events, and global issues. They are often more popular and reach more people than traditional media (Song et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2021). Many users perceive news on social media as more authentic and accessible, leading to a growing dependence on these platforms for regular updates. However, there is a downside to the abundance and speed of news: users are increasingly exposed to an overwhelming volume of information, requiring time, cognitive effort, and discernment to process effectively (Tian, 2022).

Recent Russian media scholarship provides a unique structural analysis of information overload, framing it not solely as an individual cognitive constraint but as a systemic consequence of the transformation in digital media. Scholars highlight how digitalization, fragmentation, virtualization, and the growing socio-cultural centrality of media communication intensify information flows and produce persistent informational saturation (Baychik, 2023). Research on Russian “digital youth” further shows that social media function as primary news environments, generating fragmented and personalized agendas shaped by algorithmic curation (Dunas et al., 2023). Scholars also connect these processes to new epistemic inequalities, pointing out that not all users have the same skills when it comes to finding, understanding, and using information in complicated digital environments (Vartanova, & Gladkova, 2022). However, existing Russian scholarship has primarily focused on structural transformations of media space and audience socialization, while the psychological mechanisms linking social media news overload to users’ coping behaviors, such as anxiety, information avoidance, or selective exposure, remain insufficiently examined.

The constant flow of new content, especially breaking news alerts and recommendations based on algorithms, can lead to news overload, which can make people exhausted, anxious, and less motivated to read the news (Song et al., 2017; Koselioren, & Cakir 2024). Users often use coping strategies like selective engagement, filtering out content that is not relevant, or not reading

news at all (Ku et al., 2019; Tandon et al., 2022) when they have a lot of information to sort through and process. This behavior of avoiding something can be unintentional, like when users passively choose different content, or it can be intentional, like when they are stressed, frustrated, or emotionally drained (Karlsen et al., 2020a; Skovsgaard, & Andersen 2020).

A major factor influencing these behaviors is news efficacy, which is how sure a person is that they can navigate their way around the digital news world. Users can better evaluate and manage news content when news efficacy is higher, which lessens the negative effects of too much information. On the other hand, low news efficacy makes people avoid news more and makes it harder for them to engage with it (Islam et al., 2022).

Another common way to address information overload is social filtering, in which users depend on their social networks, especially friends and peers, to identify and prioritize news that is important to them. Such approaches can help with information overload, but it can also lead to echo chambers and biased information (Park, & Kaye 2018; Goyanes et al., 2021). Recommendation algorithms and automated filtering systems, intended to aid users, may inadvertently perpetuate information silos and intensify psychological distress if not managed with transparency and ethical considerations (Thurman, 2019; Tian, 2022), particularly by limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and reinforcing existing biases in the information users receive.

An additional factor of interest is the “news finds me” (NFM) perception, where users believe that important news will naturally reach them through social feeds without active seeking (Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2017). While this perception is associated with increased news exposure, it may also reduce critical engagement and lead to greater intentional avoidance when users feel overwhelmed by unsolicited content (Song et al., 2020). Despite its growing relevance, the moderating role of the NFM perception and the mediating role of affective responses in the relationship between overload and avoidance remain underexplored.

To address these gaps, this study integrates Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986; Lu, 2020) to examine how social media news overload influences news avoidance and filtering behaviors. Specifically, it investigates the mediating effects of news efficacy and affective load, along with the moderating role of the NFM perception. In the context of Generation Z users in Vietnam – a digitally native cohort increasingly exposed to information excess – this research aims to provide insights into their coping strategies and inform future interventions in digital news literacy. This study

seeks to answer the following research question: how does social media news overload influence news avoidance and filtering behaviors among Generation Z users in Vietnam?

## **Literature review and hypotheses**

### ***News overload***

News overload refers to the perception of receiving more news than one can cognitively process, leading to emotional fatigue and disengagement (Sweller, 2011; Holton, & Chyi 2012). Based on Cognitive Load Theory, individuals have limited processing capacity; when overwhelmed, they may experience confusion, stress, and impaired decision-making (Bawden, & Robinson, 2009; Savolainen et al., 2018; Plass, & Kalyuga, 2019). Social media exacerbates this issue by continuously delivering algorithmically selected and user-generated content. This social media news overload has been associated with higher levels of stress and avoidance behaviors (Islam et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022). Empirical studies show that social media users perceive significantly more news overload compared to users of traditional media (Holton, & Chyi, 2012; Song et al., 2017). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1. Perceived news overload on social media has a positive effect on social media news avoidance.*

### ***News avoidance***

News avoidance is the behavioral tendency to intentionally or passively disengage from news content (Skovsgaard, & Andersen, 2020). This response is often rooted in emotional or cognitive overload, where individuals choose to reduce exposure to preserve their well-being (Karlsen et al., 2020b). Avoidance may manifest in several forms: skipping news updates, limiting news app use, or entirely withdrawing from news engagement. A report on digital news by Tunney et al. (2021) showed that 57% of the worldwide population “often” avoids social media news subjected to social media news overload. As the frequency of news exposure increases, people gradually perceive news overload, which can lead them to shut down cognitively and deny the necessity of news consumption (Aldoory, & Van Dyke, 2006) or to put less effort into acquiring news (Nordenson, 2008). People have a tendency to shelter themselves from the bombardment of information (Savolainen, 2007).

### ***Affective load***

It has long been recognized that persons receiving an “infoglut” (Shenk, 1997) or excessive information beyond their processing capacity suffer from responses variously labeled with terms such as information fatigue (Ni et al.,

2023), “individual psychological discomfort” (Eppler, & Mengis, 2004) or, the term adopted in this study, “affective load”. The phrase is commonly attributed to Nahl (2004), who described how the time pressure and uncertainty of excessive information could lead to irritation, frustration, anxiety, or even rage, reactions that prompt strategies to reduce the flow of information. According to Ni et al. (2023) news overload and affective load affected users’ news avoidance behavior. Research supports the mediating role of affective load between overload and avoidance (Blekesaune et al., 2012). However, research on the subject has tended to focus on more traditional news sources such as television news, news magazines, and news websites (Ksiazek et al., 2010; Edgerly, 2015), with the response of media users to news overload from social media sources less studied (Neubaum, & Krämer, 2017). This allows us to propose the following hypothesis:

*H2. Affective load is a positive mediator in the relationship between news overload and news avoidance on social media.*

### **Social filtering**

Apart from social media news avoidance, individuals use other techniques, such as social media news filtering, when confronted with news overload on social media (Park, 2019; Van Erkel, & Van Aelst, 2021). Social media users are more frequently exposed to either an algorithm of news than users of traditional news media (Guan et al., 2022) or processing the news by using social filtering (Lee et al., 2019). Social media allow users to easily track their friends’ activities: what new stories they submit, comment on, or read. To seek the most useful and relevant information and to filter out less important or irrelevant information, users can change social media settings, subscribe to a certain media channel, follow certain news experts, and block uninterested news feeds, thereby potentially reducing their feeling of news overload (Savolainen, 2007). According to Chen and Masullo Chen (2020), social media users can get credible news from abundant information by putting in less effort through the use of social filtering that provides selected and customized news according to the set filters. Filtering news on the basis of social media offers a new paradigm for obtaining and interacting with news – what this study conceptualizes as social filtering. Social filtering is one of the most important usages of social media. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H3. Perceived news overload on social media has a positive effect on social media social filtering.*

### **“News finds me” perception**

“News finds me” perception (NFM) is defined as the belief that people are well-informed without actively seeking out and following the news, because

people can access news information indirectly through “general Internet use, peers, and connections in social networks” (Song et al., 2020). The ubiquity and pervasiveness of news in our ambient environment make it difficult to avoid being exposed to it. This can lead some people with news overload perception to believe that they do not need to regularly follow the news to stay informed because the news will seemingly follow them wherever they go. A study finds that NFM perception is associated with lower levels of traditional news media use and higher news exposure through social media (Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2017). From the perspective of behavioral results, people with high levels of NFM may have an unpleasant experience with news and gradually transform their presence into negative actions. NFM perception induced people’s news avoidance. Even after “stumbling upon” a piece of news, individuals who have a high need for media (NFM) may display news avoidance behaviors, such as shifting their gaze away from a news post and towards a different post on the page or scrolling down in search of a non-news-related post (Goyanes et al. 2021). In this context, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H4. “News finds me” perception positively moderates the relationship between news overload and news avoidance on social media.*

#### ***News efficacy***

According to Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy reflects an individual’s belief in their ability to perform tasks and influence outcomes (Bandura, 1986). In the context of media use, news efficacy refers to one’s confidence in accessing, understanding, and evaluating news content. Higher news efficacy motivates users to engage with news actively and manage information overload more effectively (Bronstein, 2014; Park, 2019).

However, when users are bombarded with excessive or complex news – particularly on social media – their confidence may decline, leading to disengagement (Park, 2019). Perceived news overload undermines users’ belief that they can process news effectively, increasing the risk of avoidance. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H5. Perceived news overload on social media is negatively associated with social media news efficacy.*

News efficacy also plays a key role in shaping users’ news-seeking behavior. Individuals with high efficacy are more likely to filter and evaluate news confidently, while those with low efficacy may avoid news altogether due to perceived cognitive burden (Case et al., 2005; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2005). This suggests a mediating role of efficacy between overload and avoidance:

H6. Social media news efficacy negatively affects news avoidance.

H7. News efficacy mediates the relationship between perceived news overload and news avoidance.

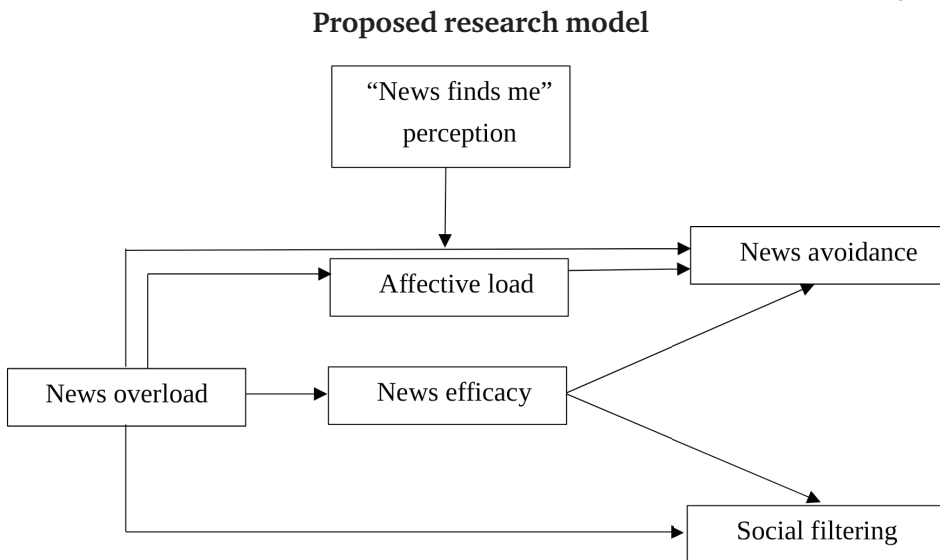
Furthermore, diminished news efficacy may lead users to depend on social filtering – relying on peers or algorithms to curate news. This behavior aligns with the “news finds me” perception, where users believe relevant news will reach them passively (Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2017). Research suggests that overwhelmed users often adopt heuristic strategies, such as deferring to social cues (likes, shares, influencers), especially when they feel uncertain about news credibility (Sundar, 2008; Metzger et al., 2010). As a result, lower news efficacy can increase reliance on social filtering instead of independent news engagement. This leads to two additional hypotheses:

H8. Social media news efficacy negatively affects social filtering on social media.

H9. News efficacy mediates the relationship between perceived news overload and social filtering.

We developed a research model as shown in *Figure 1*, based on our hypotheses. All of the hypothesized relationships, including direct, moderating, and mediating effects, are shown by solid lines. This unified visual style makes the model easier to understand and makes the proposed structural relationships easier to read.

Figure 1



## Methodology

The study used a stratified random sampling method based on geographical and socio-economic stratification to ensure that the sample was representative of a wide range of people. The General Statistics Office of Vietnam's 2019 Population and Housing Census defined six socio-economic regions in Vietnam. Because of the study's size and logistical issues, one representative city from each region was chosen to be a sampling unit (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2019).

The research team set up a network of trained collaborators, with two at each site, for a total of 12 across the six chosen locations. This made it easier to locate participants. Each collaborator received training in how to conduct surveys and ensure that the data was accurate. They were then in charge of getting people from local high schools and colleges to respond. Recruitment at each location was finalized upon reaching the specified sample size.

The Yamane formula was used to figure out the sample size needed, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error (Yamane, 1969). Because there were more than 100,000 Generation Z people at each site, we needed at least 204 valid responses from each site. This gave us a total sample size of 1,224 people. This method made sure that the study's goals were met with both statistical rigor and demographic representativeness. The people who took part were between the ages of 15 and 21 ( $M = 18.42$ ,  $SD = 2.07$ ). 42.2% of them were male, and 57.8% were female. 41.3% of them were 15 to 17 years old, and 58.7% were 18 to 21 years old.

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. All participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, assured of their voluntary participation, and informed of their right to withdraw at any time if they wished. For participants under the age of 18, written informed consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians prior to data collection. All responses were collected anonymously and treated with strict confidentiality. The survey content was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Thai Nguyen University of Sciences. For more information about sample characteristics, see *Table 1*.

Table 1

<b>Sample analysis</b>		
<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	516	42.2%
Female	708	57.8%
<b>Age</b>		
15-17	506	41.3%
18-21	718	58.7%
<b>Level of education</b>		
High school students	506	41.3%
University students	718	58.7%

*N* = 1224

The measurement instrument consisted of six reflective constructs: News Overload (NO), News Avoidance (NA), News Efficacy (NE), Social Filtering (SF), Affective Load (AL), and “news finds me” perception (NFM). A total of 23 items were used, each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

News overload (NO) was measured by three items adapted from Park (2019), reflecting participants’ perceptions of being overwhelmed by the quantity and frequency of news on social media (e.g., “I receive more news than I can process on social media”).

News avoidance (NA) was measured using five items adapted from Park (2019) and Pentina and Tarafdar (2014). These items assessed behavioral tendencies to reduce or avoid news engagement due to overload or fatigue (e.g., “I take deliberate measures to avoid reading news information when it becomes overwhelming”).

News efficacy (NE) was measured with three items adapted from Bronstein (2014) and Park (2019), reflecting users’ confidence in identifying, evaluating, and understanding news content (e.g., “I can find the news I want from social media”).

Social filtering (SF) consisted of two items adapted from Park (2019), measuring reliance on social cues and peers to filter news content (e.g., “I prefer to read the news recommended by my friends on social media”).

Affective load (AL) was measured by four items adapted from Nahl (2004), reflecting emotional and psychological strain caused by excessive news exposure (e.g., “Reading too much news will make me feel weak or tired”).

“News finds me” perception was assessed through six items adapted from Song, Gil De Zúñiga, and Boomgaarden (2020), capturing the belief that users do not need to actively seek news because it will reach them passively (e.g., “I do not worry about keeping up with the news because I know news will find me”).

PLS-SEM was selected for this study due to its appropriateness for exploratory research and its ability to handle complex models involving multiple latent constructs (Hair et al., 2021). The multivariate modeling technique was implemented using the specialized software SmartPLS (version 3.3.3), with variance-based estimation serving as the core methodological approach (Hair et al., 2019). A two-part assessment process is implied by the PLS-SEM methodology, with the first phase focusing on the measurement model and the second on the structural model (Hair et al., 2019). The model validation in the first phase is managed by taking into account the dependability and validity of the components and the manifest variables that are allocated to them (ibid). This approach entails calculating the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), outer loadings, and Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) (ibid). In reflective models, the outer loadings are employed to examine the relationships between constructs and indicators. CA and CR are the metrics for inner consistency reliability (ibid). Since HTMT (Henseler et al., 2015) conducts a statistical discriminant validity check, AVE quantifies the convergent efficiency of the factor degree (Henseler et al., 2015). The values of all predictor constructs are shown by the inner VIF values, which point to a complementary test known as collinearity evaluation. The structural model validation, or second phase, determines the level of significance of the correlations between constructs by evaluating the presented hypotheses. The structural model’s path coefficients, p-values, and t-values are calculated at this level. Multi-group analyses are used to validate each control variable, first at the global level and then among data subsets. The level of fit of the model is determined by the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) measurement (Henseler et al., 2015). However, if there are no credible outputs for the assessment of the inner model’s predictive potential, then all indicators and actions taken up to this point from both stages are meaningless (Hair et al., 2019). The final endogenous variable’s  $R^2$  and  $f^2$  values are calculated for this purpose using the PLS predict algorithm.

## **Findings and hypothesis testing**

### ***The measurement model assessment***

The values of the measures of outer loading, CR, and AVE that characterize the convergent validity and inner consistency test for the reflective variables are shown

in *Table 2 and Table 3*. Some variables, AL2, NA1, NA5, and NFM1, were removed due to factor loadings below 0.7. We see that the outer loadings are higher than the 0.7-percent minimal limit (Hair et al., 2019). In turn, this validates the indicator's reliability. Every composite reliability value and the value are significantly higher than the reference value of 0.7 (ibid). This evidence demonstrates the internal consistency of all constructs. All AVE values are higher than the threshold of 0.5 (Henseler et al., 2014), confirming the model's convergent validity. The interval [0.061, 0.623] encompasses all HTMT values that demonstrate discriminant validity, satisfying the conservative requirement that they must be less than 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). This conclusion is reflected in *Table 4*, which supports the claim that each construct is unique from the others in accordance with the criteria of empirical research (Hair et al., 2019).

*Table 2*

Factor loadings of constructs							
	AL	NA	NE	SF	NFM	NFM*NO	NO
AL1	0.839						
AL3	0.852						
AL4	0.800						
NA2		0.875					
NA3		0.867					
NA4		0.854					
NE1			0.914				
NE2			0.925				
NE3			0.908				
SF1				0.908			
SF2				0.880			
NFM2					0.736		
NFM3					0.790		
NFM4					0.847		
NFM5					0.839		
NFM6					0.838		
NFM*NO						1.434	
NO1							0.886
NO2							0.892
NO3							0.895

Table 3

**Construct reliability and validity**

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
AL	0.775	0.779	0.870	0.690
NA	0.833	0.834	0.900	0.749
NE	0.904	0.905	0.940	0.839
SF	0.751	0.759	0.889	0.800
NFM	0.869	0.873	0.906	0.658
NFM*NO	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
NO	0.870	0.870	0.920	0.794

Table 4

**Discriminant validity evaluation for the reflective variables  
by HTMT criterion**

	AL	NA	NE	SF	NFM	NFM*NO	NO
AL							
NA	0.623						
NE	0.146	0.387					
SF	0.339	0.413	0.312				
NFM	0.600	0.581	0.167	0.456			
NFM*NO	0.189	0.230	0.061	0.228	0.080		
NO	0.617	0.701	0.300	0.351	0.584	0.083	

***The structural model assessment***

The VIF scores for all construct combinations are displayed in *Table 5*. The highest value, which falls under the conservative upper limit of 3 (Becker et al., 2015), is 1.947. Therefore, no issues with predictor construct collinearity were found. With an SRMR value = 0.078 < 0.08, the research model fits the data.

To assess the suitability of the SEM model, the R<sup>2</sup> coefficient serves as a key criterion. 0.10 as the lowest acceptable R<sup>2</sup> value for the model (Falk, & Miller, 1992). The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> values were 0.482 for News Avoidance (NA), 0.257 for Affective Load (AL), 0.070 for News Efficacy (NE), and 0.115 for Social Filtering (SF), suggesting that the predictors explained a significant portion of the variance (*Table 6*). The f<sup>2</sup> effect size is used to test the effect sizes of the outcome variables (*Table 7*). 0.35, 0.15, and 0.02 are acknowledged as having

large, medium, and moderate effects, respectively (Hair et al., 2019). Cohen (2013) went on to say that values less than 0.02 have no impact. Table 7 displays the effect size of pathways ranging from no effect to a considerable influence based on these characteristics.

Table 5

**Collinearity evaluation between the predictor constructs  
by inner VIF values**

	AL	NA	NE	SF
AL		1.526		
NE		1.079		1.076
NFM		1.495		
NFM*NO		1.030		
NO	1.000	1.607	1.000	1.076

Table 6

**R<sup>2</sup> and R<sup>2</sup> adjusted**

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
AL	0.258	0.257
NA	0.484	0.482
NE	0.071	0.070
SF	0.117	0.115

Table 7

**The result of effect size (f<sup>2</sup>)**

	AL	NA	NE	SF
AL		0.045		
NE		0.062		0.040
NFM		0.047		
NFM*NO		0.030		
NO	0.348	0.144	0.076	0.057

**Testing of research hypotheses**

To test our hypotheses and make sure the estimates were stable, we used a bootstrapping method with 5000 subsamples (Yuan, 2012). We looked

at t-values ( $> 1.96$ ) and p-values ( $< 0.05$ ) to see if the relationships were statistically significant (Falk and Miller 1992). This method guarantees the reliable inference of the model's direct and indirect effects.

News overload (NO) harmed news efficacy (NE) ( $\beta = -0.266$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that too much news makes people less sure they can understand it.

News efficacy (NE) had a negative effect on news avoidance (NA) ( $\beta = -0.186$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and social filtering (SF) ( $\beta = -0.196$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This supports the idea that when news efficacy goes down, people are more likely to avoid news and filter it out.

News Overload (NO)  $\rightarrow$  News Efficacy (NE)  $\rightarrow$  Social Filtering (SF) ( $\beta = 0.052$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that news efficacy mediates the relationship between news overload and social filtering.

News Overload (NO)  $\rightarrow$  News Efficacy (NE)  $\rightarrow$  News Avoidance (NA) ( $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which shows that when news efficacy goes down, people are less likely to avoid news when they are overloaded with it.

These results confirm that news efficacy is a crucial factor. People who are overloaded with news are less confident in their ability to process it, which makes them rely more on social filtering and avoid news more, ultimately leading to a decrease in their overall engagement with news content.

The results of the analysis are the basis for the next step, which is to test the research hypotheses (see *Table 8*).

*Table 8*

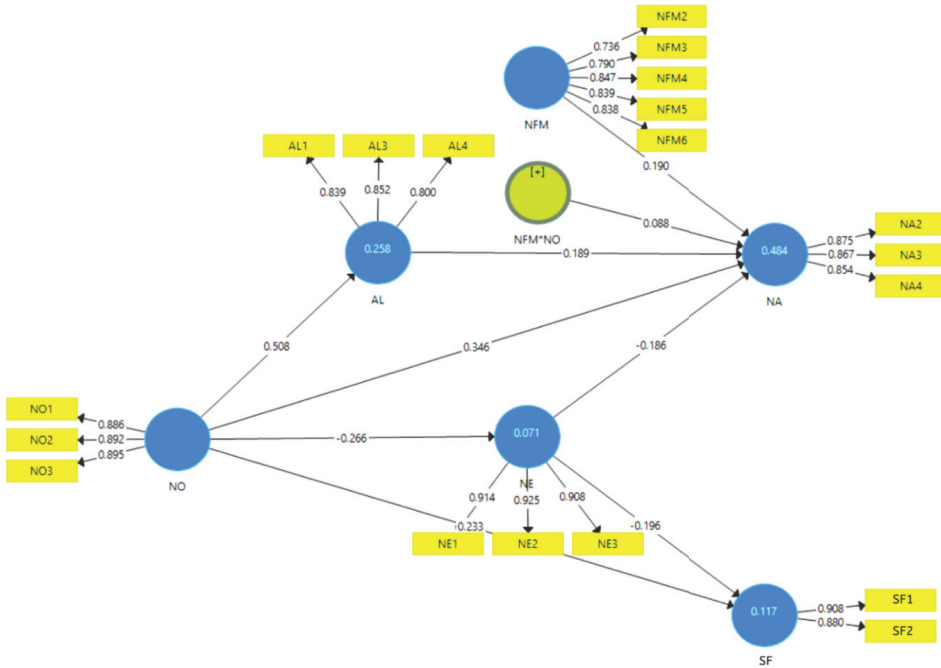
Research hypothesis testing						
Hypothesis	H	$\beta$	T-values	P-Values	Decision	
News overload -> News avoidance	H1	0.346	10.188	0.000	Supported	
Affective load * News overload -> News avoidance	H2	0.096	5.234	0.000	Supported	
News overload -> Social filtering	H3	0.233	6.099	0.000	Supported	
“News finds me” * News overload -> News avoidance	H4	0.088	5.584	0.000	Supported	
News overload -> News efficacy	H5	-0.266	8.613	0.000	Supported	
News efficacy -> News avoidance	H6	-0.186	8.447	0.000	Supported	
News efficacy * News overload -> News avoidance	H7	0.050	5.945	0.000	Supported	
News efficacy -> Social filtering	H8	-0.196	6.044	0.000	Supported	
News efficacy * News overload -> Social filtering	H9	0.052	5.093	0.000	Supported	

## Discussion and conclusion

This study offers important information regarding the impact of excessive social media news consumption on Generation Z in Vietnam. The findings validate that perceived news overload strongly influences both news avoidance and social filtering, with affective load and news efficacy playing crucial mediating roles (see *Figure 2*).

Figure 2

Output of measurement model



This study corroborates prior research indicating that excessive exposure to social media news leads to cognitive fatigue and disengagement (Koselioren, & Cakir 2024). The findings indicate that excessive news consumption has a direct and significant impact on news avoidance ( $\beta = 0.346$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), thereby corroborating hypothesis 1 (H1). This suggests that as users feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of news content, they deliberately reduce their engagement with news, either by minimizing their exposure or by completely disregarding news content.

The findings also validate that news overload enhances social filtering ( $\beta = 0.233$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), thereby corroborating hypothesis 3 (H3). This finding

supports previous research indicating that overwhelmed users rely on social cues, such as peer recommendations, to manage their news consumption (Park, 2019). Social filtering lets people pick what news they want to see and makes it easier for them to think. This phenomenon is becoming more common in digital news settings (Goyanes et al., 2021).

This study extends previous research by examining affective load and news efficacy as mediators in the relationship between news overload and news avoidance. The results corroborate hypothesis 2 (H2), indicating that affective load significantly mediates the relationship between news overload and news avoidance ( $\beta = 0.096$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The finding indicates that individuals undergoing increased emotional distress due to excessive news exposure—such as anxiety, frustration, or fatigue—are more inclined to withdraw from news consumption (Ni et al., 2023). This fits with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011), which says that when people have too much cognitive and emotional stress, they can't process information as well.

Furthermore, the study confirms that news efficacy mediates the impact of news overload on both news avoidance (H7:  $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and social filtering (H9:  $\beta = 0.052$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Users with low news efficacy – meaning they lack confidence in their ability to assess and interpret news – are more likely to avoid news entirely or depend on social filtering as a coping strategy (Park, 2019). This finding aligns with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which suggests that self-efficacy plays a critical role in shaping information-seeking behaviors.

The research result provides new empirical evidence supporting the moderating role of the “news finds me” perception in the relationship between news overload and news avoidance (H4:  $\beta = 0.088$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that individuals who believe that news will naturally reach them without active searching are more likely to disengage from news when they feel overloaded. This behavior aligns with previous research, which identifies passive news consumption as a predictor of news avoidance (Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2017).

This study advances Cognitive Load Theory by illustrating that affective load is a significant factor in news avoidance, connecting information overload to emotional distress and disengagement. Furthermore, by integrating Social Cognitive Theory, the study elucidates the role of news efficacy as a principal mediator in digital news consumption, providing a more comprehensive understanding of social media-driven news engagement. Prior research has investigated news avoidance within conventional media frameworks (Ksiazek

et al., 2010; Edgerly, 2015); this research expands our knowledge about news avoidance mechanisms specific to social media. The results complement the literature on passive news consumption by demonstrating how the “news finds me” perception intensifies avoidance behaviors in information-dense environments. These findings align with perspectives in Russian media studies that consider information overload as a structural consequence of digital media evolution rather than merely an individual cognitive constraint. Russian studies highlight that digitalization, fragmented agendas, and varying digital competencies create persistent informational saturation and epistemic divides among media users. In this context, the present findings augment this structural perspective by demonstrating how systemic conditions are expressed as individual psychological mechanisms, specifically affective load and news efficacy, that affect coping behaviors in social media news environments.

Based on these results, practical implications should focus on user-centered strategies that provide Generation Z the skills they need to handle their digital news environments well. Even though this group knows a lot about technology, they can still feel mentally stressed and exhausted. To build long-lasting habits of reading the news, it is important to improve self-control, critical thinking, and awareness of what you are doing.

First, Generation Z users can set up their news routines so they do not get too much information while still staying informed about important issues. Some of these habits could include making time to read the news, avoiding content that is repetitive or overly dramatic, turning off notifications for things that are not relevant, and only following a few trusted sources.

Second, it is important to show people how to use technology to improve news. Taking classes that teach them how to verify the sources of information, spot false information, and understand how algorithmic filtering works can help young people feel more confident about how to navigate complicated news.

Third, social filtering can become a collaborative activity by encouraging people to work together to curate news. In schools, colleges, and online communities, Generation Z members can exchange verifiable information, have meaningful discussions, and develop confidence in shared knowledge.

Finally, encouraging people to use technology with more awareness can help them stay informed and take care of their mental health. For instance, individuals can gather information from many sources, take brief pauses from the news, and pause to reflect after reading emotionally intense tales.

This study demonstrates that to prevent too much information from spreading on social media, we must modify these platforms and assist individuals

in becoming more self-reliant, literate, and emotionally resilient. Generation Z can transition from being passive information consumers to active curators of their digital lives by mastering these abilities. Empowering young users to self-regulate, critically evaluate, and meaningfully engage with news represents a sustainable pathway to reducing cognitive fatigue and enhancing informed participation in the digital public sphere.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, it focuses solely on Generation Z users in Vietnam, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other demographic or cultural contexts. Although a stratified random sampling method was employed to enhance representativeness, the sample primarily consists of high school and university students, who may differ from other generational cohorts or working-age populations in their media habits and cognitive responses to news overload. Secondly, while the model offers useful information about the psychological and behavioral mechanisms linking news overload to news avoidance and social filtering, the adjusted  $R^2$  values for news efficacy (0.070) and social filtering (0.115) indicate that the explanatory power for these constructs is relatively modest. This suggests that additional factors not included in the current model, such as media literacy, trust in news sources, algorithmic awareness, and personality traits, may significantly influence these outcomes. Lastly, although this study employs robust structural equation modeling techniques, its cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Longitudinal studies would help capture how prolonged exposure to news overload affects digital news behaviors and coping strategies over time. Moreover, incorporating qualitative or mixed-methods approaches could reveal latent psychological dimensions, such as emotional resilience, peer influence, and perceived social norms, that are difficult to capture quantitatively.

Future research should aim to address these gaps by incorporating a wider range of explanatory variables, especially sociocultural and platform-level factors, to improve the explanatory power of models involving news efficacy and filtering behaviors. Cross-cultural comparative studies could provide valuable information about how cultural orientations (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism) mediate responses to news overload. Additionally, qualitative or mixed-methods approaches may uncover latent variables such as peer influence, algorithmic literacy, or institutional trust that are difficult to quantify in a purely structural model. Longitudinal research is also essential to understand

how prolonged exposure to news overload shapes digital news behaviors over time. Finally, examining the role of emerging technologies, such as AI-driven news recommendation systems or personalized filtering tools, could inform the development of user-centered interventions aimed at enhancing news literacy and reducing cognitive fatigue in increasingly saturated media environments.

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