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THE EFFECT OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD ON DECISION POSTPONEMENT MEDIATED BY CONSUMER CONFUSION IN GENERATION Z IN JEPARA

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of information overload on decision postponement, mediated by consumer confusion. The research adopts a quantitative approach, targeting the Generation Z population in Jepara. Data collection was conducted using completed questionnaires distributed to respondents selected through random sampling techniques and the Slovin formula. A total of 310 samples were analyzed using the PLS-SEM method with Smart PLS version 4.0. The research findings indicate that excess information does not directly influence decision postponement. However, information overload positively and significantly affects consumer confusion, and consumer confusion, in turn, positively and significantly influences decision postponement. With the presence of consumer confusion as a mediating variable, the relationship between information overload and decision postponement demonstrates a positive and significant correlation. The variable of consumer confusion in this study successfully mediates the connection between information overload and decision postponement, thereby producing positive and significant effects.

Keywords: Information Overload, Consumer Confusion, Decision Postponement

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Introduction

In the continually expanding digital era, the volume of available information for individuals is increasing exponentially. Social media has created a new information environment, providing various e-commerce users with sources and content that have not been previously tailored to their preferences (Kümpel, 2022; Van Aelst et al., 2017). Although social media contains a variety of high-quality information, it also serves as a conduit for misinformation and conspiracy theories (Heiss, Nanz et al. 2023).

The advancement of technology and the ease of internet access enable individuals to obtain a substantial amount of information from various sources rapidly. However, beneath this convenience lies a well-known phenomenon referred to as information overload or excessive information. As the volume of available information increases alongside convenient access, an important phenomenon has emerged in the interactive experience of information users: information overload (Belabbes, Ruthven et al. 2022). The abundance of available information, coupled with uncertain data, results in information overload, rendering users incapable of selecting relevant information (Koroleva et al., 2010) (Dewi, Priharsari et al. 2022).

Individuals allocate a significant amount of time to processing information on social media, which includes irrelevant content such as gossip, spam, rumors, and coerced messaging (Fu, Li et al. 2020). This, in turn, can lead to an increase in the excessive information available to e-commerce users, particularly among Generation Z. The criteria for individuals classified as part of Generation Z include those born between 1997 and 2012.

Rather than providing benefits, an overload of information can lead to confusion and stress, ultimately resulting in a decline in productivity. Furthermore, with the abundance of complex and diverse information available, individuals often struggle to discern what is relevant and what is not, thereby increasing the risk of making erroneous decisions. To mitigate some of these challenges, algorithms for filtering and summarizing information have been developed (Kaufhold et al., 2020). The purpose of the algorithm is to reduce the amount of information encountered by individuals online. Furthermore, it aims to develop intelligent systems for the creation and enhancement of recommendation systems (Batmaz et al., 2019), There are novel approaches to overcome the challenges posed by information overload, including an interest in developing recommendation systems based on emotional responses, which provide insights into specific individuals' feelings (Costa and Macedo, 2013, Pennington, 2016). The significance of information overload for Generation Z lies in its capacity to enable this demographic to effectively filter pertinent information, thereby maximizing their shopping experience on e-commerce platforms.

Information overload exerts a positive and significant influence on decision postponement (Tristandinata and Research 2024). According to research, it has been demonstrated that Information Overload exerts a positive and significant influence on Decision Postponement (Xue, Jo et al. 2020). This is not consistent with research that indicates that information overload does not significantly influence decision postponement (Walsh, Hennig-Thurau et al. 2007). The study's findings indicate a significant difference in existence.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of information overload on the decision-making delay experienced by Generation Z consumers, considering the role of confusion as a mediating variable. In the digital era, characterized by access to an abundance of information, Generation Z frequently encounters excessive information, leading to confusion that can ultimately hinder decision-making. This research also aims to identify the extent to which information overload affects decision delays and the significance of consumer confusion as a mediating factor in this context.

In the contemporary digital landscape, characterized by rapid and extensive access to information, the phenomenon known as information overload is increasingly prominent, particularly among Generation Z, who have been nurtured within a digital culture. This particular generation is recognized for its proactive engagement in information-seeking across diverse platforms, including social media, e-commerce websites, and search engines. Nonetheless, the surplus of available information may induce adverse effects, such as confusion regarding information (referred to as consumer confusion), which can ultimately impede decision-making processes. This study holds considerable significance as delays in decision-making not only influence individual consumer behavior but also affect marketing strategies, the efficacy of brand communication, and sales conversion rates within the digital business sector. While several preceding studies have addressed the implications of information overload, few have specifically investigated the mediating role of consumer confusion within this context, especially concerning highly relevant demographic segments such as Generation Z. It is anticipated that this study will contribute theoretically to the advancement of discourse in marketing science and consumer behavior, in addition to furnishing practical advantages for industry stakeholders in formulating communication strategies that deliver more targeted information to Generation Z.

A notable gap exists in the literature, as indicated by Tristandinata and Research (2024), which suggests that information overload has a positive and significant impact on decision postponement. Furthermore, according to their findings (Xue, Jo et al., 2020), there is also a result that Information Overload has a positive and significant influence on Decision Postponement. This observation does not align with the research conducted by Walsh, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2007), which indicates that Information Overload does not affect Decision Postponement. Consequently, a discrepancy exists in the research findings.

Information Overload

Information overload represents a condition in which an individual becomes overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information, resulting in a processing capacity that is exceeded by the demands of that information (Edmunds & Morris, 2000). Individuals, therefore, assert that they are incapable of effectively managing information and that they are inundated by the volume of information to which they are exposed (Eppler & Mengis, 2004), and experience apprehension regarding the loss of information (Bock et al., 2010) (Müller, Schischke et al. 2023).

Classical theory defines excessive information as the experience of feeling burdened by an overwhelming amount of information received at a level that is too high. This information is neither processed efficiently nor utilized effectively (Misra, Roberts et al. 2020). The fundamental premise asserts that an individual can process only a limited quantity of information within a specified time frame. Furthermore, Davis (2011) emphasized that IO occurs in a specific domain (such as a computer screen or a workplace) and that it leads to a failure intention, which can result in reduced job efficiency. Excessive information can often become more of a burden than a benefit for users, as individuals possess a limited cognitive capacity (Gao, Liu et (Gao, Liu et al. 2018).

The objective of Information Overload pertains to the characteristics or quality attributes of information that are associated with an excess load. These characteristics include the intensity, complexity level of information, processing time, and volume of information. An overabundance of information is a significant factor in the utilization of Information Overload, as it may cause users to pause and reduce or even suspend their work activities (Lee, Son, & Kim 2016) (Hwang, Hong et al. 2020). This perspective emphasizes an extensive experimental IO study conducted by researchers on consumers and advertising (Chen & Merz, 2006). Subjective IO, conversely, refers to the emotions experienced by individuals when exposed to information, such as confusion, cognitive strain, and dysfunctional resemblance. Due to the limitations of laboratory time not typically encountered in real-world scenarios, experiments do not align with subjective IO. (Bock, Mahmood, Sharma, & Kang, 2010). Surveys and qualitative interviews are commonly employed in research to capture perceptions of complexity (Bakker, 2007; Bock et al., 2010; Hargittai et al., 2012) (Ji, Ha et al. 2014). The phenomenon of information overload arises from the disparity between the volume of information individuals receive and their capacity to process that information (Schultz & Vandenbosch, 1988). Therefore, there are two general approaches to reduce excessive information: (1) reducing the amount of incoming information and (2) improving the recipient's ability to process information (Soucek and Moser 2010).

Consumer Confusion

Consumer confusion arises from errors made by consumers in processing information, leading to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Such issues can occur prior to the purchase (Rosadi et al, 2014) (Oktaviany and Dewi 2020). Chauhan and Sagar (2021) describe how confusion arises when a consumer is unable to comprehend the various features of goods and services while making a purchase decision.

Dang (2020) believes that ineffective communication and promotional tactics lead to market misunderstandings, failure to position the product in a way that is exclusive among customers. According to Turnbull, Leek, and Ying (2000), a confused client is unable to correctly perceive various aspects of goods and services, as long as the procedure involves processing information. Consequently, such occurrences can give rise to misunderstandings or misinterpretations within the market (Matzler, Waiguny et al. 2007). Three categories of consumer confusion have been delineated in the literature: specifically, ambiguity, overload, and similarity (Walsh & Hennig-Thurau, 2002). The definition of similarity confusion is characterized as the lack of comprehension and potential change in consumer choice or erroneous evaluation of a brand caused by the 'similarity' in physical sensations between products or services (Mitchell, Walsh, & Yamin, 2004). When multiple product alternatives exhibit notable similarities in term of brand, quality, features, or functionality, it may lead to confusion (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2002) (Lu, Gursoy et al. 2016). Confusion may arise when consumers possess products or services of their own choice that are perceived as similar by customers, without any limitations which is considered similar by customers (Sharma et al., 2022) (Sharma, Singh et al. 2023).

In general, consumers often experience confusion regarding the negative implications of their actions, which adversely affects their typical purchasing behavior (Mitchell et al., 2005; Spiteri Cornish and Moraes, 2015; Garaus and Wagner, 2016). This enhances the delegation and cancellation of purchasing decisions; however, it diminishes satisfaction (Lu and Gursoy, 2015) (Anninou and Foxall 2019).

Decision Postponement

Postponement of decisions is characterized as a delay in addressing a situation that causes confusion related to purchasing decisions, accompanied by more favorable outcomes (Allan et al., 2015, p. 1331). It is also referred to as the suspension choice (Mourali, Yang, Pons, & Hassay, 2018), which comes from a study conflict in psychology. Consumers tend to postpone their purchasing decisions when they encounter similar products, and are unable to determine the differences between the existing alternatives (Sharma, Pandher et al. 2023). A multitude of travel and tour websites offer nearly identical packages, which may result in confusion for customers and consequently lead to delays in their decision-making process. The postponement of decisions may also necessitate the implementation of strategies aimed at reducing confusion for others (Allan et al., 2015). This demonstrates the consequential behavior resulting from confused consumers (Xue, Jo et al. 2020). The postponement of decisions may necessitate the implementation of reduction strategies to address the confusion experienced by others (Allan et al., 2015), which shows consequential behavior from consumer confusion.

Methods

This study adopts a quantitative methodology. The data collection tools employed consist of primary data gathered through an online questionnaire designed using Google Forms. The research examines three variables: information overload (X), consumer confusion (Z), and decision postponement (Y) within Generation Z. The assessment scale utilized in the questionnaire ranges from 1 to 10 (Aryasa and Roosdhani 2024). A collection of events, individuals, or various elements with specific characteristics that the researcher has identified is defined as a population, as stated by Sugiyono (2017). The population under examination in this study comprises the entirety of Generation Z within the Jepara Regency.

The population size in this study is substantial and cannot be determined with certainty; therefore, a random sampling technique is employed, specifically by selecting individuals or members from a small segment of the overall population. The sample size utilized in this study was derived from Rao Purba's methodology. The population of this study consisted of 283,135 Generation Z individuals in Jepara Regency, from which a sample of 310 was selected using the Slovin formula, ensuring a 5% margin of error to maintain an optimal balance between accuracy and feasibility (Slovin, 1960). This formula is frequently employed in survey research to ascertain the suitable sample size when the population is known. This investigation encompassed a total of 310 participants, with the study maintaining a respondent count of 310 in order to account for questionnaires that may not have been utilized in research or data processing. The hypothesis testing for this study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), specifically utilizing the SmartPLS version 4.0 methodology as an analytical tool in the data testing process of PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling).

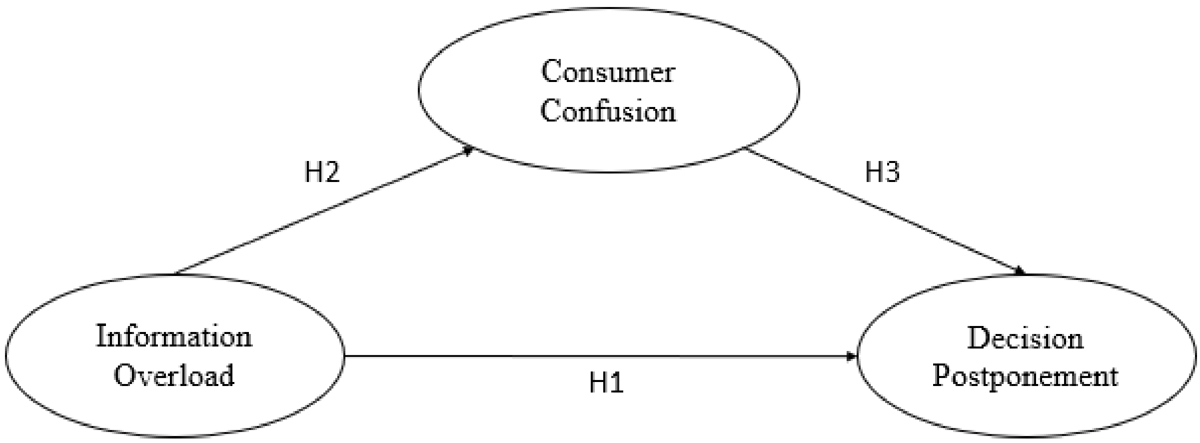

Figure 1. Research Model

Source: SmartPLS version 4.0 output data (processed)

Based on the theoretical concept review, we propose a research model as shown in Figure 1, with the following hypotheses:

H1: Information Overload has a positive and significant effect on Decision Postponement

H2: Information Overload has a positive and significant effect on Consumer Confusion

H3: Consumer Confusion has a positive and significant effect on Decision Postponement

Results and Discussion

Outer Model (Measurement Model)

The validity test and reliability test are the two measurement models used in this study.

Validity Test

The validity test employed ensures that the measurement instrument accurately measures the intended constructs. Measurement is considered acceptable when it achieves an outer loading of at least 0.7 and an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of 0.5 or higher; consequently, the measurement is deemed satisfactory (Ulum, Ghozali et al. 2008). Table 2 presents the findings of the validity test for the convergent research model. This measurement is considered adequate when the outer loading exceeds 0.7 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value is a minimum of 0.5 (Trisa and Roosdhani 2024). When the outer loading from the variable indicator exceeds 0.7 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value is at least 0.5, the measurement is considered to meet the standards for analysis in factor or structural equation models.

Table 1 suggests that the variables Information Overload, Consumer Confusion, and Decision Postponement are measured by indicators with AVE values exceeding 0.5 and validity test values converging above 0.7, confirming their validity.

Table 1. Validity Test Convergence

Variables	Indicator	*Outer Loading*	AVE	Results
Overload Information (X)	IO.1	0.878	0.684	Valid
	IO.2	0.879		
	IO.3	0.826		
	IO.4	0.803		
	IO.5	0.855		
	IO.6	0.709		
Consumer Confusion (Z)	CC.1	0.861	0.695	Valid
	CC.2	0.792		
	CC.3	0.849		
	CC.4	0.826		
	CC.5	0.840		
	CC.6	0.832		
Decision Postponement (Y)	DP.1	0.853	0.709	Valid
	DP.2	0.857		
	DP.3	0.834		
	DP.4	0.828		
	DP.5	0.836		

Source: SmartPLS version 4.0 output data (processed)

Reliability Test

The reliability test is utilized to evaluate the consistency and reliability of measurement instruments. Composite Reliability (Cr) serves as a metric for the reliability of variables and indicates a reliable value when it exceeds 0.7, although it should not be regarded as an absolute standard. The recorded range of values falls between zero and one, representing the Cronbach's Alpha value, which demonstrates the interdependence of all indicators. Therefore, if this value is greater than 0.7, the instrument can be considered reliable.

Table 2. Composite reliability & Cronbach's alpha values

Variables	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	Information
Information Overload (X)	0.928	0.906	Reliable
Consumer Confusion (Z)	0.932	0.912	Reliable
Decision Postponement (Y)	0.924	0.897	Reliable

Source: SmartPLS version 4.0 output data (processed)

In the reliability test, the results presented in Table 2 indicate that the indicators derived from the study variables yield values that exceed 0.7. This signifies that the indicators possess a high level of consistency in measuring the construct in question. Therefore, it can be concluded that the indicators can be regarded as reliable within the context of this study.

Inner Model (Measurement Model)

The inner model is effective for project connection because the relationship between the latent variables and the unidentified variables can be measured directly. The tool utilized is the SmartPLS program 4.0, which has been specifically developed for estimating structural variances based on equality. The structural model for this study is depicted in Figure 2.

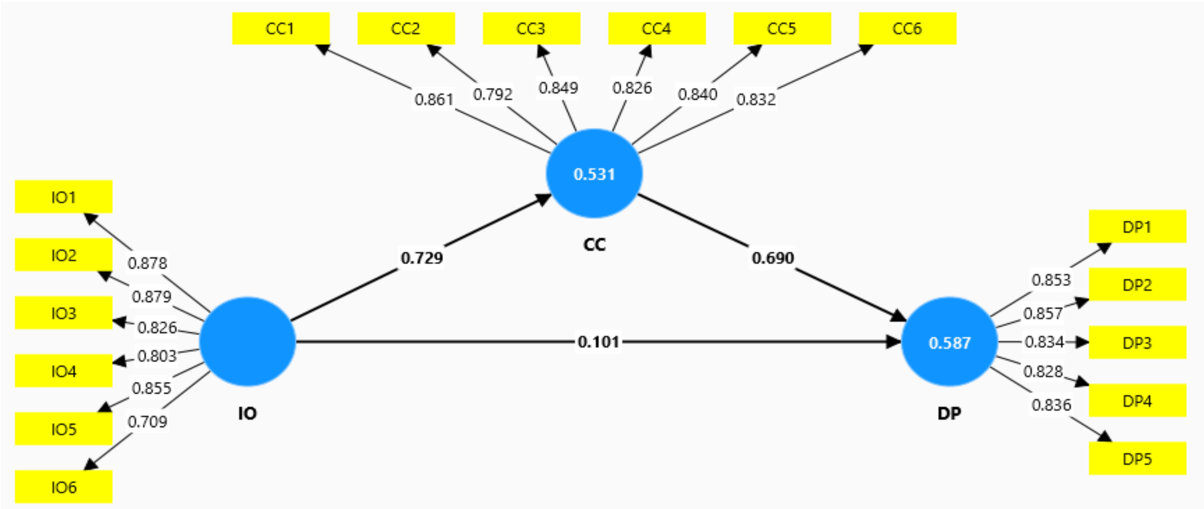

Figure 2. Structural Model

Source: SmartPLS version 4.0 output data (processed)

R-Square

By utilizing the R-squared test, one can ascertain the extent to which the independent variables exert no influence on the dependent variable. The effect of the R-squared value is deemed strong when it approaches 0.67, moderate when it approaches 0.33, and weak when it approaches 0.19. (Roosdhani, Komaryatin et al. 2024).

Table 3. R-Square

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
Consumer Confusion	0.531	0.529
Decision Postponement	0.587	0.584

Source: SmartPLS version 4.0 output data (processed)

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that the R-squared value for Decision Postponement is 0.587, while the Adjusted R-squared value is 0.584. This signifies that the total influence of all construction exogenous to Y accounts for 58.7%, which is considered moderately influential. Additionally, other factors and indicators not covered in this study may account for the remaining 41.3%.

Mediation Test

There exist three primary situations in the context of mediation: non-mediation, full mediation, and partial mediation. Partial mediation is identified when the relationships between independent and dependent variables remain positive even after the inclusion of variable mediation in the analysis. Additionally, this occurs when the relationships between dependent variables and variable mediation also exhibit a positive correlation. Full mediation is defined as the scenario where the relationship between independent and dependent variables is rendered insignificant or negative subsequent to the mediation of control variables; however, the relationship between dependent variables and variable mediation retains a significant and positive status. Conversely, non-mediation transpires when a positive relationship is observed between independent and dependent variables, while a negative relationship prevails between dependent variables and the mediator. The P-value serves as a tool for interpreting analytical results obtained through the bootstrapping method utilizing SmartPLS 4.0. Statistically, there is no significant association if the P-value for the effect special no directly exceeds 0.05. Conversely, a significant positive association is indicated when the P-value is less than 0.05.

Table 4. Specific Indirect Effects

Variables	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Information Overload -> Consumer Confusion -> Postponement Decision	0.502	0.504	0.058	8,611	0.000

Source: SmartPLS version 4.0 output data (processed)

Influence Information Overload on Mediated Decision Postponement Consumer Confusion

From Table 4, which describes the Specific Indirect Effect, it can be seen that there is no direct effect from information overload to decision postponement. However, consumer confusion as a mediator shows a significant and positive connection, with a P-value smaller than 0.05, specifically at 0.000. Therefore, based on these findings, it can be concluded that complete mediation exists between information overload and decision postponement. It can be interpreted that while information overload can lead to decision postponement, its impact is not excessively strong. Nevertheless, with the presence of consumer confusion as a mediator, the influence of information overload on decision postponement becomes considerably stronger.

Hypothesis Testing

In the process of testing hypotheses, T-Statistics and P-Values are calculated for each coefficient path. Within the Smart-PLS software version 4.0, the Path Coefficient computed through the Bootstrapping technique suggests that the hypothesis is accepted if the P-Value is less than 0.05.

Table 5. Path Coefficients

Variables	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Information Overload -> Postponement Decision	0.101	0.100	0.077	1.298	0.194
Information Overload -> Consumer Confusion	0.729	0.730	0.032	22,830	0.000
Consumer Confusion -> Postponement Decision	0.690	0.690	0.069	10,046	0.000

Source: SmartPLS version 4.0 output data (processed)

Influence of Information Overload on Decision Postponement

The T-statistic value of 1.298 is less than the T-table value of 1.650, and the P value of 0.194 exceeds the significance level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H0) is accepted, resulting in the rejection of the alternative hypothesis (H1a). In this context, it is indicated that there is a negative influence between the variables of Information Overload and Decision Postponement. It can be concluded that as the level of Information Overload increases, there is no corresponding impact on the level of Decision Postponement. Research on information overload has a significant positive effect on decision postponement. According to Xue et al. (2020), consumers experience information overload due to complex stimuli, and this can lead to frustration, resulting in postponed decisions. (Sharma, Pandher et al. 2023).

Influence of Information Overload on Consumer Confusion

The results indicate that the T statistic value (22.830) exceeds the T-table value (1.650), and the P value (0.000) is less than 0.05; thus, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis (Ha2) is accepted. In this context, it can be observed that there is a significant positive influence between the variable of Information Overload and Consumer Confusion. It may be concluded that as the level of Information Overload increases, the level of Consumer Confusion also rises significantly. Research conducted by Özkan supports the findings of Tolon et al. (2015), who suggest that consumers' limited cognitive capacity for processing information is due to their skills. Therefore, after several stimuli pass through a certain threshold, the stimulus will be affected by excess information. As a result, consumers will be Confused.

Influence Consumer Confusion on Postponement Decisions

The T statistics value of 10.046 exceeds the T-table value of 1.650, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0) when the P value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis (Ha3) is accepted. In this context, it is indicated that there is a significant positive influence between the variable of Consumer Confusion and Decision Postponement. It can be concluded that a higher level of Consumer Confusion correlates positively with an increase in the level of Decision Postponement in a significant manner.

Previous research has identified a significant impact stemming from dimensions of confusion on the postponement of decisions in product categories characterized by low involvement. It illustrates that a delay in the decision-making process regarding the purchase of a product occurs due to the excessive amount of product variation (Singh, Sharma et al. 2018). Research has demonstrated that confusion among consumers when choosing a product has a positive and direct impact on their decision postponement (Amirhoseini, Roshani et al. 2018).

Conclusion

This study comprehensively examines the relationship between information overload, consumer confusion, and decision postponement among Generation Z. The findings suggest that information overload does not have a direct and significant influence on decision postponement. However, the role of consumer confusion as a mediator between information overload and decision postponement produces a positive and significant influence on these variables. This implies that while information overload does not directly influence decision postponement, it does exert a positive and significant effect indirectly through consumer confusion, which serves as a mediating factor in decision postponement.

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