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Binge-Watching and Information Overload in the Digital Environment: An Empirical Study

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Abstract: The widespread use of streaming platforms and social media has made binge-watching - the continuous consumption of multimedia content within a short period - increasingly common among adolescents. Although prior studies mainly examine binge-watching as entertainment or problematic use, its relationship with information overload among high school students remains underexplored, particularly in emerging digital contexts. This study investigates the association between binge-watching behaviors and perceived information overload among Vietnamese high school students, with attention to underlying psychological dimensions. A cross-sectional survey of 151 students at a public high school in Hanoi revealed that binge-watching is prevalent and significantly associated with information overload. Anticipation showed the strongest positive effect and emerged as the most robust predictor, whereas craving had a significant negative effect. Dependency and avoidance were not statistically significant. Overall, information overload appears to be shaped more by motivational and cognitive mechanisms than by viewing duration, especially expectation-driven engagement and differences in self-regulatory capacity. The findings contribute to understanding digital information behavior by highlighting the role of motivational structures in adolescent cognitive overload.

Keywords: binge-watching behavior; information overload; high school students; content expectancy.

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1. Introduction

In the context of digital transformation, information consumption and processing behaviors have changed significantly under the influence of streaming platforms such as Netflix, YouTube, and TikTok. Unlike traditional media, these platforms allow users to control content, timing, and duration of consumption, encouraging

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continuous and intensive information reception (Starosta and Izydorczyk 2020). Consequently, new challenges have emerged for information management in digital environments.

In this context, "binge-watching" - understood as the consumption of multiple units of multimedia content within a short period has become increasingly common, especially among young users (Anghelcev et al. 2021). From an information management perspective, binge-watching reflects increasing information density and reduced self-regulation in information reception, placing greater pressure on individuals' information processing capacities.

High school students are particularly vulnerable to these changes because their abilities to process, evaluate, and organize information are still developing, while their exposure to digital devices and streaming platforms is extensive (Tse et al. 2025). In Vietnam, where internet usage rates are among the highest globally, adolescents represent a major user group (Nguyen et al. 2025). In Hanoi, the combination of advanced digital infrastructure and educational conditions facilitates intensive online information access, making binge-watching a common part of students' daily information activities.

At the same time, "information overload" has become a central issue in information management. It occurs when the volume of information exceeds an individual's processing capacity, reducing the efficiency of reception, evaluation, and decision-making (Horvath et al. 2017). Although widely examined in social media and digital work contexts, information overload related to continuous multimedia consumption remains insufficiently studied.

Binge-watching is still underexplored as a form of information behavior in information management research. Existing overload models rarely address the characteristics of continuous multimedia streams generated by streaming platforms, particularly among young users. This gap limits understanding of students' information consumption behaviors in digitally saturated educational environments.

Therefore, this study examines binge-watching as a form of information behavior and analyzes its relationship with perceived information overload among students at Nguyen Trai High School, Hanoi. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) identify the prevalence and characteristics of binge-watching among high school students; (2) measure perceived information overload in digital environments; and (3) test the extent to which binge-watching predicts or contributes to information overload.

By situating binge-watching within the analytical framework of information management, this research extends existing overload models to account for continuous multimedia information streams characteristic of streaming platforms. Empirically, the study provides evidence from a Vietnamese high school context, thereby enriching the literature on young users' information behavior in digitally saturated educational environments. Practically, the findings offer a scientific basis for developing information management strategies and strengthening information literacy education in general schooling under conditions of digital transformation. However, the mechanisms through which binge-watching motivations and platform-driven continuous exposure translate into perceived overload remain insufficiently understood, particularly in relation to users' self-regulatory capacity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Binge-Watching Behavior

Binge-watching is commonly defined as the continuous consumption of multiple units of multimedia content within a short period through on-demand streaming platforms (Starosta and Izydorczyk 2020; Anghelcev et al. 2021). Unlike traditional media consumption, binge-watching enables users to control the timing, pace, and duration of viewing, thereby increasing the intensity and continuity of information exposure.

Early studies mainly examined binge-watching from media and psychological perspectives, emphasizing entertainment motivation, viewing experience, and emotional engagement (Rubenking and Bracken 2018; Anghelcev et al. 2021). Research shows that this behavior is especially prevalent among young users and students with high exposure to digital devices and streaming platforms. It is also associated with reduced self-regulation, loss of time control, and extended viewing beyond initial intentions.

Recent research has expanded to the cognitive and mental health consequences of binge-watching. Empirical evidence links the behavior to sleep disorders, cognitive fatigue, procrastination, and reduced learning concentration (Kwok et al. 2024; Özkent and Akdoğan 2025). Among students, prolonged multimedia consumption, particularly at night, may disrupt attention and cognitive recovery, reducing the efficiency of information processing during subsequent school activities.

Despite its prevalence, binge-watching is still primarily treated as entertainment or a psychological-social phenomenon rather than a form of information behavior. Its characteristics - passive, continuous, and high-intensity information reception - may place substantial pressure on individuals' information processing and management capacities in dense digital environments.

From an information management perspective, binge-watching can be understood as continuous multimedia information stream consumption with limited selection or control strategies. However, this dimension remains insufficiently incorporated into models of information behavior and information overload, particularly for high school students. This gap highlights the need to examine binge-watching not only as entertainment behavior but also as a potential contributor to information overload in digital environments.

2.2. Research on Information Overload

"Information overload" is a central concept in information science and information management, describing a condition in which the volume, speed, or complexity of information exceeds individuals' cognitive processing capacity, thereby reducing the efficiency of reception, evaluation, and decision-making (Miller 1956; Eppler and Mengis 2004). Foundational studies emphasize the limits of human information processing capacity, particularly under continuous and difficult-to-control information streams.

In digital environments, research has shifted from measuring information quantity to examining characteristics of information environments and users' self-regulation capacity. Digital platforms, supported by continuous updates and recommendation algorithms, generate high-density information streams with few natural stopping points, increasing cognitive pressure even without active information

seeking (Horvath et al. 2017). Consequently, information overload is increasingly understood as a subjective state associated with users' experiences and information management capacity rather than information quantity alone.

Research has also highlighted the psychological, learning, and behavioral consequences of information overload, including cognitive fatigue, reduced concentration, stress, and learning procrastination (Fu et al. 2020). Among high school students, simultaneous exposure to multiple information sources may disrupt deep processing and knowledge organization, negatively affecting learning effectiveness and decision-making.

Recent studies further suggest that passive and continuous information reception can contribute to information overload. Beyond active information seeking, prolonged entertainment content consumption may increase cognitive burden. Merrill and Rubenking (2019) argue that continuous multimedia consumption without adequate selection or breaks may produce latent information overload, in which users experience cognitive and emotional strain without fully perceiving overload itself.

From an information management perspective, information overload results not only from rich information environments but also from imbalance between information streams and users' self-regulation capacity. However, most research still focuses on social media, work, or online learning contexts, while continuous multimedia consumption behaviors such as binge-watching remain underexamined. This gap highlights the need to extend information overload frameworks to entertainment-oriented information consumption among young users in digital environments.

2.3. Research Gap and Proposed Approach

Although research on binge-watching and information overload has expanded considerably, these areas remain largely separate. Studies on binge-watching mainly approach the phenomenon from entertainment, psychological, or media perspectives, emphasizing viewing motivation and emotional or health consequences, while rarely treating binge-watching as a form of information behavior characterized by passive, continuous, and high-intensity content reception.

In contrast, information overload research primarily focuses on social media, online learning, and digital work environments, often measuring overload as a result of general platform use or total information exposure. This approach rarely distinguishes specific consumption behaviors such as binge-watching, which may affect information processing and self-regulation differently (Horvath et al., 2017). Consequently, empirical evidence on the direct relationship between binge-watching and information overload remains limited, particularly among high school students, who have high exposure to streaming platforms while still developing information management capacity.

To address this gap, the present study conceptualizes binge-watching as a form of continuous multimedia information consumption and examines its impact on perceived information overload among students at Nguyen Trai High School in Hanoi. This approach extends the analytical framework of information science and information management while providing empirical evidence for information literacy education and information stream management in digitally transformed educational contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Subjects and Sampling Method

The study was conducted among students at Nguyen Trai High School, Hanoi, an urban public upper-secondary school characterized by high digital infrastructure and internet penetration. The school was purposively selected as an appropriate setting for examining binge-watching behavior and perceived information overload within a digitally saturated educational environment. The study therefore represents a bounded urban case rather than a nationally representative sample.

Stratified sampling combined with simple random sampling was applied. Stratification by gender and grade level (Grades 10–12) ensured proportional representation, after which students were randomly selected within each stratum. Participation was voluntary.

A total of 151 valid questionnaires were collected through online and in-person surveys. The sample was relatively balanced by gender and grade level and reflected intensive digital exposure, with most participants reporting frequent social media use and long-term platform experience (Table 1).

Table 1: *Description of the survey research sample*

Criteria		Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	77	51.0
	Female	74	49.0
Academic year	Grade 10	54	35.8
	Grade 11	44	29.1
	Grade 12	53	35.1
Daily social media usage time	Less than 2 hours per day	13	8.6
	2 to 5 hours per day	94	62.3
	6 to 10 hours per day	41	27.2
	More than 10 hours per day	3	2
Time watching films, videos, series	Less than 2 hours per day	105	69.5
	2 to 5 hours per day	40	26.5
	6 to 10 hours per day	4	2.6
	More than 10 hours per day	2	1.3
Duration of social media use	1 - 2 years	11	7.3
	2 - 3 years	51	33.8
	3 - 4 years	33	21.9
	≥ 4 years	56	37.1

For comparative analyses, categories with small frequencies were merged to ensure statistical stability. "Do not watch" was combined with "Less than 2 hours per day," while "≤ 1 year" of social media use was merged with "1–2 years." These adjustments were applied only to group comparisons and did not affect construct measurement.

Although moderate in size, the sample met common thresholds for regression-based behavioral analysis with a limited number of predictors. As the study aimed for analytical inference rather than statistical generalization, the sample was considered methodologically appropriate.

Qualitative data were also collected through open-ended questions on students' experiences with binge-watching and information overload. Responses were analyzed thematically through initial coding and recurring pattern identification to complement the quantitative findings.

3.2. Research Instruments

The study employed a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 items measuring binge-watching behavior, 4 items measuring perceived information overload, and 6 demographic questions.

Binge-watching was measured using the Binge-Watching Addiction Questionnaire (BWAQ; Forte et al. 2021), covering four dimensions: Dependency, Anticipation, Craving, and Avoidance. The scale was translated into Vietnamese and administered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always).

Perceived information overload was measured using a 4-item scale adapted from Zhang et al. (2022). The original 7-point Likert scale was standardized to five points to improve consistency and response clarity for adolescent participants. Previous methodological studies suggest that reducing response categories from seven to five does not substantially affect reliability or construct validity while improving cognitive accessibility.

The questionnaire was reviewed for language accuracy and piloted with a small student group before formal data collection. Data were analyzed using SPSS. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine construct validity prior to regression analysis.

3.3. Research Ethics

The study adhered to ethical principles regarding the collection, processing, and use of participant data. All survey and interview activities were voluntary and conducted with transparency and confidentiality assurances.

Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU Hanoi, under Certificate No. XHNV-161, dated January 14, 2026.

3.4. Data Analysis Method

Data were processed and analyzed using SPSS. Prior to analysis, the dataset was cleaned to remove invalid questionnaires and identify missing values, while observed variables were coded consistently. Scale reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Correlation and regression analyses were then conducted to examine the relationship between binge-watching behavior and perceived information overload among students at Nguyen Trai High School, Hanoi. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

4. Results

4.1. Scale Reliability and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Scale reliability and validity were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, item-total correlations, the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) index, Bartlett's test, factor loadings, and total variance extracted (TVE). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Scale reliability and EFA factor analysis*

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Minimum Item-Total Correlation	KMO	Bartlett's Test p-value	Minimum Factor Loading	TVE (%)
Binge-watching	**.786**	**.497**	**.748**	**<0.001**	**.693**	**63.698**
	Dependency	.804	.452	.778	<0.001	.617
	Anticipation	.844	.654	.788	<0.001	.809
	Craving	.832	.473	.805	<0.001	.529
	Avoidance	.783	.570	.686	<0.001	.799
	Information Overload	.770	.472	.707	<0.001	.687

Specifically, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all scales exceeded recommended thresholds, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Hair et al. 2019). KMO values were above 0.6 and Bartlett's test was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the suitability of the data for EFA (Kaiser 1974). Factor loadings and total variance extracted also exceeded accepted minimum thresholds, supporting the convergent validity and structural adequacy of the scales for behavioral research in information management and information science.

4.2. Level of Binge-Watching Behavior among High School Students

4.2.1. Current Status of Binge-Watching Behavior among High School Students

Table 3 shows differences across dimensions of binge-watching behavior among high school students. Among the four dimensions, anticipation had the highest mean score (M = 3.26; SD = 0.98), suggesting that binge-watching was mainly driven by anticipated positive experiences.

Table 3*: Current status of binge-watching behavior among high school students*

Dimension	Mean	SD
Dependency	2.16	0.69
Anticipation	3.26	0.98
Craving	2.09	0.69
Avoidance	1.74	0.74
Total	**2.331**	**0.61**

In contrast, dependency (M = 2.16), craving (M = 2.09), and especially avoidance (M = 1.74) remained relatively low, indicating limited dependence or avoidance-related viewing behavior.

Overall, binge-watching behavior showed a low-to-moderate overall level (M = 2.331; SD = 0.61), suggesting that binge-watching in this sample functioned primarily as controlled entertainment rather than compulsive behavior. However, the relatively high anticipation score may indicate a subgroup of students with more intensive content consumption tendencies and a potentially higher risk of information overload.

4.2.2. Comparison of Binge-Watching Behavior among High School Students by Gender

Table 4 presents gender differences in binge-watching behavior among high school students. Female students reported significantly higher scores than male students in dependency, anticipation, craving, and overall binge-watching behavior ($p < 0.01$). The largest difference was observed for anticipation, indicating stronger expectation-driven viewing among female students. In contrast, no significant gender difference was found for avoidance behavior ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4: *Comparison of binge-watching behavior among high school students by gender*

Dimension	Gender	Mean	SD	Levene's Test p-value	T-test p-value
Dependency	Male	1.889	.581	.334	.000
	Female	2.443	.699		
Anticipation	Male	2.918	.915	.696	.000
	Female	3.635	.932		
Craving	Male	1.935	.611	.967	.003
	Female	2.264	.727		
Avoidance	Male	1.640	.737	.615	.074
	Female	1.855	.734		
Binge- watching	**Male**	**2.095**	**.552**	**0.945**	**0.000**
	Female	**2.549**	**.595**		

Overall, the findings suggest that gender is associated with differences in the level and pattern of binge-watching behavior among high school students, consistent with previous studies on adolescent digital entertainment consumption (Panda and Pandey 2017; Sung et al. 2018; Anghelcev et al. 2021).

4.2.3. Comparison by Grade Level

Binge-watching behavior appeared relatively consistent across grade levels, with only minor differences observed among Grades 10, 11, and 12 (Table 5).

Table 5: *Comparison of binge-watching behavior by grade level*

Dimension	**Grade Level**	**Mean**	**SD**
Dependency	Grade 10	2.21	.602
	Grade 11	2.08	.744
	Grade 12	2.16	.752
Anticipation	Grade 10	3.24	.942
	Grade 11	3.18	1.144
	Grade 12	3.37	.900
Craving	Grade 10	2.02	.573
	Grade 11	2.14	.772
	Grade 12	2.12	.729
Avoidance	Grade 10	1.66	.645
	Grade 11	1.68	.722
	Grade 12	1.88	.834
Binge-watching	**Grade 10**	**2.28**	**.570**
	Grade 11	**2.27**	**.677**
	Grade 12	**2.38**	**.611**

Among the four dimensions, anticipation remained the highest across all grade levels, with Grade 12 students recording slightly higher scores (M = 3.37) than Grade 10 (M = 3.24) and Grade 11 students (M = 3.18). Dependency and craving also showed comparable levels across grades. Although

Grade 12 students reported somewhat higher avoidance scores (M = 1.88), the overall level remained low on the 5-point scale.

Overall binge-watching scores showed only a slight increase from Grade 10 (M = 2.28) and Grade 11 (M = 2.27) to Grade 12 (M = 2.38). However, ANOVA results indicated no statistically significant differences across grade levels ($p > 0.05$). These findings suggest that binge-watching behavior remains relatively stable throughout high school and is not substantially influenced by grade progression or increasing academic pressure.

4.2.4. Comparison by Daily Social Media Usage Duration

Binge-watching behavior varied across levels of daily social media use, with overall scores increasing from the <2-hour group (M = 2.139) to the 6–10-hour group (M = 2.410) before stabilizing among students using social media for more than 10 hours per day (M = 2.409) (Table 6).

Table 6: *Binge-watching behavior by daily social media usage duration*

Dimension	Usage Time	Mean	SD
Dependency	Less than 2 hours/day	1.935	1.227
	2 to 5 hours/day	2.136	.604
	6 to 10 hours/day	2.256	.620
	More than 10 hours/day	2.611	1.387
Anticipation	Less than 2 hours/day	2.788[d]	1.240
	2 to 5 hours/day	3.266	.922
	6 to 10 hours/day	3.506[be]	1.002
	More than 10 hours/day	2.250[d]	.433
Craving	Less than 2 hours/day	2.065	1.363
	2 to 5 hours/day	2.083	.610
	6 to 10 hours/day	2.090	.553
	More than 10 hours/day	2.666	.719
Avoidance	Less than 2 hours/day	1.769	1.149
	2 to 5 hours/day	1.712	.692
	6 to 10 hours/day	1.788	.721
	More than 10 hours/day	2.111	.509
Total	**Less than 2 hours/day**	**2.139**	**1.161**
	2 to 5 hours/day	**2.299**	**.518**
	6 to 10 hours/day	**2.410**	**.597**
	More than 10 hours/day	**2.409**	**.542**

Note: b indicates a significant difference with the "Less than 2 hours/day" group at 5% significance; d indicates a significant difference with the "6 to 10 hours/day" group at 5% significance; e indicates a significant difference with the "More than 10 hours/day" group at 5% significance.

Across dimensions, dependency generally increased with usage intensity and reached its highest level in the >10-hour group (M = 2.611). Anticipation showed a different pattern, peaking in the 6–10-hour group (M = 3.506) before declining in the >10-hour group (M = 2.250), with significant differences between several categories. Craving and avoidance remained relatively stable at lower and moderate usage levels but increased among the highest-use group.

Although not all pairwise differences were statistically significant, the findings suggest that moderate-to-high social media exposure is associated primarily with expectation-driven engagement, whereas excessive exposure is more closely related to dependency- and craving-oriented patterns. Overall, usage intensity appears to be an important factor differentiating binge-watching behavior among adolescents.

4.2.5. Comparison by Daily Online Video/Series Viewing Duration

Differences in binge-watching behavior were observed across levels of daily online video and series viewing duration (Table 7), with greater variation than that found for general social media use.

Table 7: *Binge-watching behavior by daily online video/series viewing duration*

Dimension	Viewing duration	Mean	SD
Dependency	Less than 2 hours/day	1.995[c]	.660
	2 to 5 hours/day	2.533[b]	.605
	6 to 10 hours/day	2.458	.209
	More than 10 hours/day	2.833	1.885
Anticipation	Less than 2 hours/day	3.204	.996
	2 to 5 hours/day	3.537	.953
	6 to 10 hours/day	2.687	.826
	More than 10 hours/day	2.500	0.000
Craving	Less than 2 hours/day	1.968[ce]	.701
	2 to 5 hours/day	2.357[b]	.571
	6 to 10 hours/day	2.357	.473
	More than 10 hours/day	3.000[b]	.606
Avoidance	Less than 2 hours/day	1.603[c]	.685
	2 to 5 hours/day	2.091[b]	.788
	6 to 10 hours/day	1.750	.687
	More than 10 hours/day	2.333	.471
Total	**Less than 2 hours/day**	**2.193[c]**	**.617**
	2 to 5 hours/day	**2.629[b]**	**.525**
	6 to 10 hours/day	**2.313**	**.372**
	More than 10 hours/day	**2.666**	**.437**

Note: b indicates a significant difference with the "Less than 2 hours/day" group at 5% significance level; c indicates a significant difference with the "2 to 5 hours/day" group; e indicates a significant difference with the "More than 10 hours/day" group.

Overall binge-watching scores increased significantly from the <2-hour group (M = 2.193) to the 2–5-hour group (M = 2.629, $p < .05$), while higher-exposure groups maintained elevated levels without substantial additional increases. This pattern suggests a threshold rather than a strictly linear effect of viewing duration.

Dependency, craving, and avoidance followed similar trajectories, showing significant increases between the <2-hour and 2–5-hour groups. Craving reached its highest level among students viewing more than 10 hours per day (M = 3.000), indicating stronger motivational reinforcement under extreme exposure. In contrast, anticipation peaked in the 2–5-hour group (M = 3.537) and declined among heavier viewers.

Taken together, the findings indicate that moderate daily viewing (2–5 hours) may represent a critical escalation point in binge-watching behavior. Although extreme viewing duration was associated with higher dependency and craving, most statistically significant differences emerged between low- and moderate-exposure groups, supporting a non-linear relationship between viewing duration and binge-watching behavior.

4.2.6. Comparison by Years of Social Media Usage

Differences in binge-watching behavior across years of social media use are presented in Table 8. Overall binge-watching scores showed a modest upward trend with longer usage duration, reaching the highest level among students with ≥4 years of use (M = 2.393, SD = .597).

Table 8: *Binge-watching behavior by years of social media usage*

Dimension	Usage duration	Mean	SD
Dependency	1 - 2 years	2.000	1.120
	2 - 3 years	2.068	.574
	3 - 4 years	2.065	.584
	≥ 4 years	2.333	.741
Anticipation	1 - 2 years	3.250	1.101
	2 - 3 years	3.397[e]	1.071
	3 - 4 years	3.318	.976
	≥ 4 years	3.129[c]	.899
Craving	1 - 2 years	1.987	1.096
	2 - 3 years	1.932[e]	.524
	3 - 4 years	2.147	.660
	≥ 4 years	2.234[c]	.724
Avoidance	1 - 2 years	1.636	.993

	2 - 3 years	1.634	.589
	3 - 4 years	1.737	.644
	≥ 4 years	1.875	.854
Total	**1 - 2 years**	**2.218**	**1.001**
	2 - 3 years	**2.258**	**.584**
	3 - 4 years	**2.317**	**.544**
	≥ 4 years	**2.393**	**.597**

Note: c indicates a significant difference with the "2 - 3 years" group at 5% significance; e indicates a significant difference with the "≥ 4 years" group at 5% significance.

At the dimensional level, dependency and craving generally increased with longer social media use, with the ≥4-year group reporting the highest scores. In contrast, anticipation peaked in the 2–3-year group (M = 3.397) before declining slightly among long-term users, with a significant difference between the 2–3-year and ≥4-year groups. Avoidance showed only limited variation across groups.

Overall, the findings suggest a stage-sensitive rather than strictly linear pattern of binge-watching behavior. Although the observed differences were modest, consistently higher composite scores among long-term users may reflect cumulative reinforcement associated with prolonged digital engagement.

4.3. Level of Information Overload among High School Students

4.3.1. Current Status of Information Overload among High School Students

Descriptive analysis results show that high school students are experiencing quite evident information overload levels in the process of using social media, with an overall scale mean score of M = 3.581 (SD = 0.844) (Table 9). This value exceeds the scale's midpoint threshold, showing that information overload phenomenon is not isolated but has become a common experience in students' digital lives.

Table 9: *Current status of information overload level among high school students*

Item	Mean	SD
Distracted by excessive information volume received on social media	3.52	1.057
Feeling "overloaded" when processing massive daily information on social media	3.30	1.082
Information volume on social media feels burdensome to process	3.40	1.167
Recognizing only a very small portion of social media information truly meets personal needs	4.11	1.084
Total	**3.581**	**.844**

Examining specific aspects, the most prominent manifestation of information overload lies in awareness of information value and relevance. The item "Recognizing only a very small portion of social media information truly meets personal needs" recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.11; SD = 1.084). This result shows that students not only receive a large amount of information but are also clearly aware of the imbalance between accessed information volume and their actual usefulness. This is a sign that information overload does not simply originate from quantity but is also related to difficulties in selecting and evaluating appropriate content.

Additionally, items reflecting experience in the information processing process also achieved quite high scores. Specifically, students reported being frequently distracted by excessive information volume on social media (M = 3.52; SD = 1.057), feeling that this information amount is a burden to process (M = 3.40; SD = 1.167), as well as experiencing a feeling of "overload" when having to receive and process information daily (M = 3.30; SD = 1.082). These values are all higher than the midpoint, reflecting cognitive stress states and decreased concentration capacity when students must face continuous and dense information streams.

At the overall level, the scale's standard deviation is relatively low compared to individual items, showing that information overload level is recorded quite uniformly throughout the research sample, although individual differences still exist in how they perceive and cope with information. This suggests that information overload has become a common characteristic of the social media use environment among high school students, rather than an isolated individual phenomenon.

In summary, results show that high school students not only are exposed to large volumes of information on social media but also must face significant challenges in processing, selecting, and evaluating information value. This status creates an important empirical basis for subsequent analyses of the relationship between information overload and digital content use behaviors, especially binge-watching behavior, in the following sections of the study.

4.3.2. Gender Comparison of Information Overload Levels

To examine whether gender influences experiences of information overload in social media environments, the study compared mean scores between male and female students using the information overload scale. Results show female students recorded higher mean scores (M = 3.66; SD = 0.867) than male students (M = 3.51; SD = 0.821), reflecting stronger tendencies to perceive information pressure among females.

Levene's test for homogeneity of variance yielded p = 0.232 (> 0.05), confirming the assumption of equal variance between groups was satisfied; thus, independent t-test results are reliable. Subsequent t-test results yielded p = 0.270 (> 0.05), indicating the 0.15-point difference between groups did not reach statistical significance at the 5% level. In other words, although female students self-reported higher information overload levels than males, this difference may occur by chance and does not reflect genuine population-level differences among high school students.

This result suggests gender is not a determining factor for information overload perception levels among high school

students. Both males and females face information pressure at moderate-to-high levels (M > 3.5 on a 5-point Likert scale), indicating information overload is a universal rather than gender-specific issue. This aligns with current contexts where both genders access social media with increasingly similar frequencies and purposes—from entertainment and learning to social communication—resulting in nearly equivalent exposure to massive information volumes.

In conclusion, gender analysis reveals no statistically significant differences in information overload levels between male and female high school students. This finding emphasizes that information management education interventions—enhancing critical thinking and source selection skills—should be implemented uniformly for both genders rather than designed separately by gender. Simultaneously, high mean scores in both groups reaffirm the urgency of integrating digital literacy education into secondary curricula to equip students with effective "filtering–processing–evaluating" capabilities in the digital era.

Table 10: *Comparison of information overload levels by grade level*

Dimension	Grade Level	Mean	SD
Information Overload Level	Grade 10	3.546	0.834
	Grade 11	3.454	0.781
	Grade 12	3.721[a]	0.899

Note: a = significantly different from "Grade 10" and "Grade 11" groups at 5% significance level

4.3.3. Comparison by Grade Level

To examine differences in information overload across educational stages, the study compared mean scores among students in Grades 10, 11, and 12. Results are presented in Table 10.

The results indicate a gradual increase in information overload across grade levels, with the highest level observed in Grade 12. Although Grade 10 and Grade 11 show relatively comparable levels, Grade 12 students report a marked increase in perceived overload, suggesting an intensification of cognitive burden in the final stage of secondary education.

Inferential analysis further confirms a statistically significant difference between Grade 12 and Grade 10 ($p < 0.05$), while the difference between Grade 12 and Grade 11 does not reach statistical significance, despite showing a consistent upward trend. This pattern suggests a non-uniform escalation of information overload across educational stages.

In terms of variability, Grade 12 exhibits the highest dispersion, indicating heterogeneous experiences of overload within this group, whereas Grade 11 shows relatively greater homogeneity. This suggests that as students approach graduation, differences in coping capacity and exposure intensity become more pronounced.

Overall, the findings suggest that information overload is developmentally sensitive, increasing particularly in the final

year of high school, when academic demands and multi-source information exposure converge. This pattern highlights educational stage as a contextual factor shaping cognitive load in digital environments.

4.3.4. Comparison by Daily Social Media Usage Duration

Table 11 indicates a statistically significant association between daily social media usage duration and perceived information overload. Mean scores increase across usage categories, with the lowest level observed among students using social media less than 2 hours per day (M = 2.94, SD = 1.02). This group differs significantly from all higher-usage groups ($p < .05$).

Table 11: *Comparison of information overload levels by duration of daily social media usage*

Dimension	Usage duration	Mean	SD
Information Overload Level	Less than 2 hours/day	2.942[a]	1.021
	2 to 5 hours/day	3.574[b]	.829
Information Overload Level	6 to 10 hours/day	3.756[b]	.744
	More than 10 hours/day	4.166[b]	.629

Note: a indicates a significant difference with the "2 to 5 hours/day", "6 to 10 hours/day", and "More than 10 hours/day" groups at 5% significance; b indicates a significant difference with the "Less than 2 hours/day" group at 5% significance.

In contrast, students using social media for 2 hours or more per day report consistently elevated overload levels (M range = 3.57–4.17), with no statistically significant differences among these moderate- and high-usage categories. The highest mean is observed in the group exceeding 10 hours daily (M = 4.17, SD = 0.63).

The pattern suggests a threshold effect rather than a strictly linear increase: perceived overload rises sharply once daily usage exceeds approximately two hours and remains elevated at higher exposure levels. This discontinuity indicates that intensity of digital engagement, rather than incremental duration alone, may play a decisive role in activating overload perceptions.

Overall, the findings support the proposition that extended daily exposure to social media is associated with heightened informational strain, with a marked distinction between low-usage and all higher-usage groups.

4.3.5. Comparison by Daily Online Video/Series Viewing Duration

Examination of information overload across daily film/video/series viewing duration indicates observable differences in mean levels, revealing a non-linear rather than monotonic pattern (Table 12).

Table 12: *Comparison of information overload levels by daily online video/series viewing duration*

Dimension	Viewing duration	Mean	SD
Information Overload Level	Less than 2 hours/day	3.569	.820
	2 to 5 hours/day	3.618	.930
	6 to 10 hours/day	3.062	.314
	More than 10 hours/day	4.500	.353

Students watching fewer than five hours per day reported relatively similar overload scores (M = 3.569 and 3.618). The 6–10-hour group showed a lower mean (M = 3.062), whereas the >10-hour group exhibited a markedly elevated level (M = 4.500), suggesting intensified overload at extreme consumption levels.

This fluctuation implies a threshold dynamic. Moderate-to-high viewing does not consistently correspond to higher overload, whereas very high exposure appears associated with sharply increased cognitive pressure. The temporary decline observed in the 6–10-hour group may reflect selective engagement or short-term adaptation; however, the pronounced rise in the highest-use group suggests diminishing regulatory capacity once exposure surpasses a critical level.

Although no formal significance testing was conducted for this comparison, the magnitude of mean differences particularly in the extreme-use category indicates substantive variation in perceived overload. Overall, overload remains elevated across most groups, reinforcing its prevalence within digitally saturated media environments.

These findings support a non-linear interpretation of the relationship between viewing duration and information overload, consistent with threshold-based models of cognitive capacity constraints rather than a simple linear exposure effect.

4.3.6. Comparison by Years of Social Media Usage

Analysis across social media usage duration shows that perceived information overload does not follow a linear trend but instead reflects a staged, non-monotonic pattern shaped by experience and behavioral adaptation (Table 13).

Table 13: *Information overload levels by years of social media usage*

Dimension	Usage duration	Mean	SD
Information Overload Level	1 - 2 years	3.409	.957
	2 - 3 years	3.754	.764
	3 - 4 years	3.530	.785
	≥ 4 years	3.486	.920

At the dimensional level, distinct trajectories are observed. Dependency remains relatively stable in early and middle stages but increases among long-term users, suggesting stronger behavioral immersion with prolonged exposure. Anticipation peaks at the 2–3-year stage and declines thereafter, indicating an adjustment of expectations as usage becomes habitual. Craving gradually increases with usage duration, reflecting reinforcement of motivational drive over time, while avoidance shows minimal variation, with only a slight rise in long-term users.

At the aggregate level, binge-watching-related intensity increases modestly with longer usage, but the pattern is uneven across dimensions. The divergence between anticipation and craving suggests a motivational shift from expectation-driven engagement in early stages to reinforcement-driven continuity in later stages.

Overall, the non-linear pattern indicates that digital exposure does not translate into proportional increases in overload. Instead, users appear to transition from an exploratory phase characterized by heightened sensitivity and expectations to a habituation phase marked by stabilized but sustained behavioral engagement. However, this stabilization does not eliminate informational pressure, which remains consistently present.

The findings highlight that information overload is shaped by temporal stages of digital engagement rather than exposure duration alone, underscoring the importance of early-stage interventions during initial adoption periods, when behavioral expectations are most malleable.

4.4. Analysis of the Relationship between Binge-Watching Behavior and Information Overload Level among High School Students

4.4.1. Correlation between Binge-Watching Behavior and Information Overload Level among High School Students

Correlation analysis indicates a differentiated pattern of association between binge-watching components and perceived information overload, suggesting that informational pressure in digital environments is primarily shaped by motivational–cognitive mechanisms rather than by viewing behavior per se.

Table 14: *Correlation between binge-watching behavior and information overload level among high school students*

Variable	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Dependency	1				
Anticipation	.433**	1			
Craving	.607**	.533**	1		
Avoidance	.531**	.316**	.644**	1	
Information Overload Level	.203*	.447**	.112	.142	1

Note: means correlation at 5% significance level; ** means correlation at 1% significance level.*

Among the four dimensions, anticipation exhibits the strongest and most consistent positive association with information overload, indicating that expectation-driven

engagement plays a central role in intensifying perceived cognitive burden. This suggests that students who actively anticipate new content and continuously monitor updates are more likely to experience informational strain, plausibly due to heightened exposure to multiple simultaneous content streams and increased susceptibility to FOMO-driven consumption patterns.

Dependency shows a weaker but statistically significant positive relationship with information overload, implying that habitual or reliance-based viewing contributes to cognitive strain, albeit to a lesser extent than expectation-driven mechanisms. This indicates that sustained engagement alone is insufficient to fully explain overload unless accompanied by anticipatory engagement structures.

In contrast, craving and avoidance do not demonstrate statistically significant relationships with information overload ($p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that emotionally driven continuation of viewing or escapist consumption tendencies do not directly translate into perceived informational overload. Rather, overload appears to emerge more from how information is anticipated and structurally engaged with, rather than from affective continuation or avoidance motivations alone.

The interrelationships among binge-watching dimensions further confirm the multidimensional and internally coherent nature of the construct, in which motivational and emotional components are mutually reinforcing. However, this internal coherence does not uniformly translate into informational pressure, reinforcing the argument that information overload is selectively sensitive to specific motivational pathways rather than to binge-watching intensity as a whole.

Overall, the results suggest that information overload is primarily associated with anticipation-driven engagement and, to a lesser extent, dependency-based usage patterns, both of which reflect active orientation toward continuous content acquisition. These findings imply that effective mitigation strategies should extend beyond reducing screen time to include regulation of expectation structures, reduction of continuous content tracking behavior, and strengthening of selective information engagement skills. In particular, fostering awareness that constant updating is not necessary may help reduce cognitive pressure in densely mediated digital environments.

4.4.2. Impact of Binge-Watching Behavior on Information Overload Level

To examine the predictive role of binge-watching dimensions on perceived information overload, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with four predictors (dependency, anticipation, craving, and avoidance). The model is statistically significant ($F = 11.493$; $p < 0.001$) and explains 23.9% of variance, indicating that binge-watching constitutes a meaningful but partial determinant of students' cognitive overload.

Table 15: *Impact of binge-watching behavior and information overload level*

	Unstandardized B		**Standardized Beta**			**Multicollinearity Statistics**
Independent Variable	B	SE	Beta	t	p-value	VIF
Constant	2.395	.243		9.846	.000	
Dependency	.116	.115	.096	1.007	.315	1.728
Anticipation	.454	.074	.531	6.117	.000	1.445
Craving	-.378	.137	-.308	-2.768	.006	2.381
Avoidance	.140	.111	.123	1.260	.210	1.819
$R^2 = 0.239$, F = 11.493, p – value = 0.000						
Dependent Variable: Information Overload Level						

Among predictors, only anticipation and craving are statistically significant with opposite effects. Anticipation is the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = 0.531$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that heightened expectation and continuous monitoring of upcoming content (e.g., new episodes or platform updates) increases sustained attentional engagement with uninterrupted information streams, thereby amplifying perceived cognitive load.

In contrast, craving shows a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.308$, $p = 0.006$). This suggests that stronger motivational drive to continue viewing is associated with lower perceived overload when controlling for other factors. Rather than a paradox, this may reflect more goal-directed and selective viewing patterns, where users follow specific content sequences with reduced exposure to irrelevant information, thereby limiting cognitive dispersion in dense digital environments.

Dependency and avoidance are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), indicating that habitual use or escapist motivation does not directly predict overload when motivational structure is accounted for. This reinforces that overload is primarily shaped by expectation-driven engagement rather than usage frequency or compensatory motives.

Model diagnostics confirm robustness, with VIF values (1.445–2.381) well below conventional thresholds, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

Overall, anticipation emerges as the dominant cognitive driver of information overload, while craving may function as a mitigating factor under structured engagement conditions. These findings suggest that interventions should focus on regulating expectation mechanisms and promoting intentional viewing strategies rather than solely reducing screen time.

5. Discussion

The findings conceptualize binge-watching among high school students as a multidimensional behavioral psychological structure rather than a purely recreational practice. Although overall levels are moderate, dimensions are unevenly distributed, with anticipation emerging as the dominant factor and avoidance remaining marginal. This configuration

reflects an integrated system shaped by motivational drivers and platform affordances, particularly auto-play and algorithmic content continuity.

The relationship between viewing duration and information overload is non-linear, exhibiting a threshold pattern rather than linear accumulation. Effects become pronounced at moderate exposure (2–5 hours/day), while extreme users (>10 hours) report the highest overload and stronger dependency tendencies. This indicates a transition from hedonic engagement to cognitively demanding consumption beyond a critical exposure threshold. Consistent with Eppler and Mengis (2004), overload arises primarily from a mismatch between information input and cognitive processing capacity rather than sheer volume.

Qualitative evidence reinforces this mechanism. Students describe sustained attentional depletion and cognitive saturation under continuous content exposure. A Grade 12 student reported difficulty processing academic information amid persistent digital intake, while Grade 10 and Grade 11 students highlighted fatigue, sleep disruption, and cognitive strain. These accounts suggest that binge-watching produces continuous attentional load rather than episodic fatigue, reinforcing overload as a sustained cognitive state. These accounts suggest that binge-watching produces continuous attentional load rather than episodic fatigue, reinforcing overload as a sustained cognitive state.

Overload is further intensified by content irrelevance and interactional pressure. Students experience strain not only from the quantity of information but also from non-essential content streams and persistent expectations of connectivity. A Grade 11 student described the cognitive burden of simultaneous engagement across multiple content streams, while another Grade 10 student reported pressure to avoid "falling behind." This indicates that overload emerges from filtering inefficiency and socially reinforced informational obligations within algorithmic environments.

Usage experience introduces a dynamic adaptation pattern. Students with less than one year of social media use exhibit the highest overload, reflecting an initial "information shock" stage prior to the development of self-regulation strategies, consistent with Zhang et al. (2022). Overload is also elevated among Grade 12 students, suggesting that academic pressure amplifies cognitive burden.

At the behavioral level, anticipation is the strongest predictor of overload, underscoring the role of expectation, continuous tracking, and FOMO in intensifying cognitive strain (Buglass et al. 2017). In contrast, craving negatively predicts overload, indicating that goal-directed engagement enhances selectivity and reduces informational noise, consistent with Flayelle et al. (2019). Dependency and avoidance show no significant effects, implying that overload is not driven by duration or escapist motives but by expectation-structured engagement in algorithmically mediated environments.

Overall, binge-watching and information overload are co-constructed through the interaction of psychological anticipation, platform affordances, and academic contextual pressures. The evidence demonstrates that overload is not exposure-driven per se but arises from sustained attentional demand, poor filtering capacity, and expectation-based engagement. Accordingly, interventions should prioritize expectation regulation and selective information-processing competencies rather than time-restriction strategies.

6. Research Limitations

Although the study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between binge-watching and information overload, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the sample is limited to a single urban high school in Hanoi (n = 151), which constrains external validity. While the bounded case design supports analytical depth, findings may not fully capture variations across different educational contexts and digital governance environments.

Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Although the study identifies significant associations and threshold patterns, it cannot confirm temporal or directional causality between binge-watching components and information overload.

Third, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce recall and perception bias. Despite acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7), subjective estimation of usage intensity and overload may not fully reflect actual behavioral exposure.

Fourth, the study does not incorporate objective behavioral traces (e.g., platform usage logs, viewing duration, or content-level data), limiting the ability to capture real-time digital engagement patterns emphasized in the Discussion, particularly regarding continuous exposure and filtering inefficiency.

Finally, contextual and platform-level variables (e.g., algorithmic recommendation systems, content type variation, and passive vs active viewing modes) were not directly measured, although they are theoretically relevant to the mechanisms identified in the study.

These limitations suggest the need for multi-method, longitudinal, and cross-context research designs to further validate the dynamic interaction between binge-watching behavior and information overload in digitally saturated environments.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that binge-watching among high school students has become a stable behavioral pattern within digitally saturated environments, characterized by a moderate overall level but distinct internal differentiation across components. Anticipation emerges as the central dimension, highlighting the dominance of intrinsic expectation-driven motivation in sustaining engagement, rather than dependency or avoidance. This suggests that students exercise partial agency in structuring their content consumption, although such agency may also generate cognitive pressure when not effectively regulated.

Information overload is observed at a relatively high level and increases with both usage intensity and exposure to continuous multimedia streams. Importantly, overload is driven not only by information volume but also by low relevance and weak filtering capacity, reinforcing the role of cognitive processing constraints rather than the information environment itself. This aligns with the paradox whereby increased access to digital content simultaneously amplifies difficulty in identifying meaningful information.

The relationship between binge-watching and information overload is non-linear and shaped by cumulative exposure, motivational structures, and interaction frequency. While adaptation effects emerge among more experienced users, reducing

perceived overload to some extent, such adaptation does not eliminate cognitive strain but rather reflects behavioral adjustment under sustained digital exposure. Accordingly, the relationship is better understood as a dynamic interaction between exposure and self-regulation capacity rather than a direct causal escalation.

Overall, the findings indicate that the core issue does not lie in binge-watching itself but in the absence of effective self-regulation mechanisms within highly stimulating digital environments. Without adequate competencies in information filtering, time management, and goal-oriented usage, binge-watching may shift from active engagement to passive consumption, increasing cognitive burden and reducing information processing efficiency.

The study, therefore, underscores the importance of developing digital self-regulation and information literacy competencies among high school students. At the same time, the findings highlight the need for broader institutional and technological interventions, including the design of digital environments that reduce excessive stimulation, support user self-regulation, and promote meaningful content engagement. This suggests that addressing information overload requires not only individual competencies but also coordinated efforts in educational practices and digital platform governance.

Future research should further examine adaptive mechanisms and contextual moderators in larger and more diverse samples to better understand how digital consumption behaviors evolve under accelerating technological transformation.

Declaration of AI Use

The authors used an AI-based tool (Claude) to assist with language editing and translation during the preparation of this manuscript. All intellectual content, including the study design, data analysis, and interpretation of results, was developed solely by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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