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## Information Overload In Present Times: A Study

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**Abstract:** Internet today coupled to high-tech telecommunication technology, thanks to the private players in the telecom industry and rapid infrastructural development has resulted in generation of huge amount of firsthand information, which has become a blessing to the mankind. Information has become a basic need of present times. But as over eating causes obesity and causes both physical and mental damage to a person, likewise abundance of information also gives rise to concepts like information overload, information obesity and information anxiety. Though there is no universally accepted definition of Information Overload., this paper studies the various aspects of information overload along with its concept, causes, symptoms, consequence and remedies of information overload.

**Index Terms** - Information, Information Overload, Overload, Information Obesity, Information anxiety

### Introduction

Jonassen et al. (2003:p. iii) say: "Since evolving from primordial ooze, humans have interacted with the world and struggled to make sense out of what they experienced; this is as natural to humans as breathing". Information, defined very broadly is the product of this interaction. It includes data, technical specifications, laws and procedures, works of art, emotional responses, statements of morality and ethics, and more, produced then communicated by human beings interacting with the world and each other. This information can be stored, and this capacity of humans to store information make it distinct from other species. Information can be stored in mind, in books and can also be stored digitally. Through their interactions, the environment itself becomes a storage medium.

It is no secret that a person or a nation is rich if it is information rich. Information referred here is the primary sources of information, resulting from multifarious research activities initiated in numerous subject fields which are easily communicated to the entire society because of lightning development of telecommunications. With fast development of telecommunications along with easy and cheap availability of internet around the world and India have resulted in generation of huge or bulk information. With advent of internet and generation of chunks of information, issues related to information overload has become relevant than ever before. Tidline (1999) states that because the existence and description of information overload is not documented by rigorous investigation within library and information science, information overload is a myth of modern culture, in particularly the information society. On the other hand, empirical studies conducted e.g. in management science suggests that information overload is a real problem that significantly affects task performance and job satisfaction. (Edmunds & Morris, 2000). Studies on information literacy also recognize information overload as an important issue. (Bawden, 2001)

Telecommunication technologies has changed the world dramatically and has literally turned the world into “global village” as correctly stated by former President of India, K. R. Narayanan. It has affected and changed the lives of every strata of society, whether rich or poor. Without telecommunications our needs remain unsatisfied.

The telecommunication sector in India was controlled by the union government since independence, until it was opened for the private players. Active participation of private players particularly Reliance Jio has drastically changed the telecommunications sector in India forever. With decreased tariff rates, introduction of 4G and now 5G mobile networks has helped our country to move towards an information driven society. Right now, India is the world’s second biggest broadcast communications market with a supporter base of 1.16 billion and has enrolled a solid development. Patel (2022) stated that the telecommunication plays a critical role in the expansion of mobile communications and the information society. It remains at the center of practically every industry’s growth, innovation and disruption. The telecommunication business is one of the world’s fastest expanding industries, with enormous potential to benefit people directly or indirectly. According to Insights Research, global telecoms service revenue increased from \$2.2 trillion in 2015 to \$2.4 trillion in 2019.

Madden A. D. (2000) citing McCreadie and Rice (1999) defined the concept of information in four perspectives.

1. *Information as a Representation of knowledge*: from time immemorial information was regarded as reservoir of knowledge. Books were generally used as storage medium, but electronic media are becoming increasingly significant. These studies reflects on the ability of an information literate person to select required information from over abundant supply of information.
2. *Information as Data in the environment*: Information can be derived from a variety of environmental stimuli and phenomenon, not all of which are meant to “send” a message, but which can be instructive when understood correctly.
3. *Information as part of the Communication Process*: People not words or data, are the source of meaning. In the processing and interpretation of information, timing and social factors play a vital influence.
4. *Information as a Resource or Commodity*: Information is sent from sender to receiver in the form of message. The communication is interpreted by the receiver in the same way that it was intended by the sender. As information is distributed or traded, there may be added value.

Thus we see that information does not strictly mean transfer of information from the sender to the receiver, it means generation of information from every possible sources. Problem arises when this information cross manageable proportions and humans are overwhelmed by this gigantic amount of information which can be called as information overload.

From earlier times there were many books to read. Summaries of texts and list of collection holdings came as a solution. In the European medieval age of handwritten manuscript, the problem was perceived to become more serious. Though the term “information overload” is a much discussed concept, there is no universally accepted definition of information overload. The concept of information overload is said to originate at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with George Simmel, a German sociologist and philosopher who was the first to analyze the term in modern terms (Klapp, 1986; Savolainen, 2007), but its roots can be traced way back. Currently the amount of information that is created every two days is roughly equivalent to the amount of information that was created between the beginning of the human civilization and 2003 (Jackson and Farzaneh, 2012)

Alvin Toffler, an American writer and futurist, popularized the term “information overload” in his book “Future Shock” in 1970. “Overload” suggests a system being fed with too much power or loaded with too much weight: as a result it may break or blow like a fuse. Shenk refers to the phenomenon as “data smog” (Shenk, 1997). This suggests a more insidious intrusion, a polluting by-product of the information revolution, just as air-based smog was and remains an unsightly and possibly dangerous product of the industrial revolution. According to Gross, information overload is defined as follows “Information overload happens when a system’s processing capacity is exceeded by the amount of data it receives. The cognitive processing capacity of decision makers is fairly limited, as a result when there is an abundance of information,

decision quality is likely to suffer". Take the example of visitor who seriously wants to explore all the collections of a museum. He or she enters a hall meticulously inspects all the collections, enters another hall or two but despite having an honest intention of visiting the entire museum soon becomes overwhelmed by the amount of collections and his legs and brain starts to become fatigued and he/she is forced to abandon the plan of visiting the entire museum. This is an example of information overload in the present day world.

Information overload is a topic that is relevant to many disciplines, including medicine, social sciences, marketing, computer science, education and psychology (Edmunds and Morris, 2000). This means that there is no single, universally accepted definition. In everyday language, information overload is often equated with receiving too much information (Eppler and Mengis, 2004). According to Klausegger et al. (2007), a consistent feature of the various scientific definitions is that the amount of information is initially related to better performance or better decisions but that, above a certain amount of information leads to worse outcomes( an inverted U shaped relationship; Eppler and Mengis, 2004; Klausegger et al., 2007). More specifically, Klapp (1986) defined information overload as an excessive amount of information that the receiver can no longer process efficiently without distraction, stress, increased errors, or other costs that reduce the efficient use of the information.

As physical obesity is not healthy for a normal individual. It hinders the well-being of that particular individual, slowly making him handicapped in every respect of his life both physically and mentally. In the same way information obesity is a failure to use informational resources in ways that build, within individuals and communities, sustainable foundations for every activity. In other words, the information is not becoming knowledge and is not, therefore, becoming embedded by individuals and communities into their own environments.

Wurman, an expert in information architecture, defined information anxiety as the state "produced by the ever-widening gap between what we understand and what we think we should understand. It is the black hole between data and knowledge, and it happens when information doesn't tell us what we want or need to know" (Wurman 1989,p. 34; Wurman, Leifer, Sume and Whitehouse, 2001,p.14). He further suggested that that "information anxiety can afflict us at any level and is as likely to result from too much information as too little information" (p. 44). He also remarked that the uncertainty surrounding the existence of a particular piece of information is a major cause of information anxiety.

### ***Objectives of the study***

The objective of the study is to find the following

- i. Determine the source of information overload
- ii. Ascertain the symptoms of overload information
- iii. Reveal the consequences of information overload
- iv. Recommend possible solutions to information overload

### ***Cause of Information Overload***

Hoq M G (2014) Cited by Eppler and Menjis (2002) in a research they conducted on the concept of information overload which are as follows.

1. The presence of information from several sources;
2. The availability of excess amount of information;
3. Reveal the consequences of information overload;
4. The inability to comprehend the material due to lack of time.

An American psychologist Stanley Milgram (1970) posted some overload warnings for persons living in huge cities in particular. He identified six common reactions to constant exposure to a significant information overload in that study, which are as follows:

1. Each input is given less time
2. Low-priority inputs are ignored
3. Redrawing of boundaries in specific social transactions in order to shift the responsibility of overload to the other persons in the transactions.
4. The use of filtering devices to reduce inputs
5. The reluctance to receive communication
6. The establishment of specialized institution to absorb information that would otherwise overwhelm a single person.

### ***Symptoms of Information Overload***

Nejadirani, F and Rajabzadeh, A. (2011) stated definitely that information overload is manifested by the symptoms described below.

1. Lack of concentrations due to a short term memory overload.
2. Hurriedness is a mental condition in which a person believes they must race against a clock.
3. Multilateral behavior, which is typically the outcome of either too much or too little production power.
4. Anger is quickly irritated due to a bad mood, sensitivity, or being easily irritated.
5. Too much motivation or familiarity causes the brain to malfunction or cease working.

### ***Consequences of Excessive Information***

The presence of information overload has a lot of dangers that it place upon humanity and it usually cause fatigue to the bearer of the weight that the excesses of these information imposes.

Elson (2015) identified a number of consequence of information overload as it is stated below

1. When a huge amount of information is available, one tends to know less since the quantum of what is known is too less in comparison to the information available.
2. Excessive information can cause brain to freeze of exhaustion.
3. The existence of information overload leads to addiction in the sense that the individual becomes overly reliant on sources such as the internet, resulting in a loss in productivity in the workplace, which is damaging to the organizations growth and development.
4. Mental ability is impaired in this situation since almost all information needed by the user to make a decision is available in vast quantities from a variety of sources.
5. The vast amount of information available, particularly unfiltered information causes information to become tainted, resulting in poor decision making.

### ***Remedy of Information Overload***

In a study conducted by Kazi Mostak Gausul Hoq (2014), he believes if a person can develop at least a moderate degree of information literacy, he or she will be able to access relevant information from a variety of sources and use it intelligently for problem solving. Simpson and Prusak (1995) also emphasized that the information provided by the information professionals should be of high value and delivered in the most convenient style and format possible to fight information overload.

Another important issue in this era of information communication technology boom, which has resulted in the emergence of information overload, is the requirement for information professionals and users to develop web searching abilities. Because searching skills are a necessity for dealing with information overload, any user who is familiar with them is more likely to get more relevant information from the web than someone who is not.



**Conclusion:**

Though the amount of information is likely to increase day by day, so as the information overload. To tackle information overload, basic information literacy should be imparted from the school level itself. Only timely information literacy education can save the citizens of tomorrow from the plethora of information. It is high time for the information professional to train the citizens to tomorrow regarding the merits and demerits of the new technologies that are sure to flood the academic arena soon.

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