What is Information Overload?

Information overload refers to overwhelming the brain with a huge amount of information data than it can handle and process. Information overload occurs when task inputs to the mind exceed its ability to synthesize. The information overload definition refers to the technologically oriented world where too much information is available about a topic or context. It constitutes excess information available for a person to decode and comprehend. Therefore, information overload causes brain fatigue, limits brain focus, and impedes decision-making. Product designers are always careful to avoid information overload in their product design not to jeopardize the user experience. Simple and precise information about a product is enough to help users understand how a product works.

The phrase 'information overload' was first used by Bertram Gross, a political science professor at Hunters College, in his 1964 article "The Managing of Organizations." The phrase was later promoted by an American futurist and writer known as Alvin Toffler in his book *Future Shock* in 1970. However, the phrase *information overload* is believed to have existed as early as the 3rd century BCE.

Some of the common causes of information overload include:

- Pressure to create and compete in the provision of information.
- A considerable amount of new data is continually being created.
- Huge volumes of contradicting and old inaccurate information.
- Lack of more straightforward methods to process, compare and evaluate information.
- The increasing weight of historical data is being discovered daily.
- Rapid increase in information media channels like print media, electronic media, etc.

Modern information technology has impacted information overload both positively and negatively. The invention of artificial intelligence and other modern technologies, for instance, has led to efficiency in handling massive information sources, narrowing them down to whatever is most important. Contrastingly, modern technology has enabled more access to information, thereby increasing information overload.

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Effects of Information Overload

Communication overload is when too much communication takes place simultaneously to the extent that one is overwhelmed and cannot process and handle it simultaneously. For example, several email notifications, phone calls, and texts pop up simultaneously on the phone, so the user is frozen deciding which one to respond to and which to leave pending.

Information overload can lead to the following effects:

- **Textual overload**- This refers to the multiple and simultaneous receiving of data beyond one's capacity to handle it. Textual overload causes frustration and confusion as one cannot prioritize which data to manage.
- **Analysis Paralysis**- This is the inability to make better decisions due to overthinking a problem. When bombarded with vast amounts of data options, an individual or group wrangles about each option's pros and cons, therefore causing more confusion on which option to pick.
- **Outcome overload**- Information overload compromises the outcomes of processes and slows down the productivity and decision-making of an employee. When employees are overwhelmed by information overload, they become fatigued, leading to errors and mistakes in their work.

Long-time subjection to information overload causes negative impacts on mental well-being due to disillusionment. Excess work and too much information overload lead to confusion (disillusionment) while searching for information. **Disillusionment** is the disappointment that arises after discovering something is not as good as one might have believed. During data handling, disillusionment can make people feel lost, confused, and disconnected from their social environments.

Strategies to Cope with Information Overload

It is possible to cope with and overcome difficulties associated with information overload. Some effective strategies that can help individuals cope with information overload include:

- Avoid multitasking- Multitasking or juggling is unhealthy for a good mental state and, to a greater extent, worse for an individual's productivity. One needs to focus on one task for a specified time limit for more significant progress. Concentrating on one activity is less tasking than multitasking.
- Using the organization's systems- Involves utilizing technology to store extra data that one cannot handle instantly. This enables one to take what is essential and keep the rest for a later time, hence reducing work overload.
- Taking a break- It enables one to deal with stress, fatigue, and emotional distress that often develop when overwhelmed with too much information about a task. Coping with information overload involves structuring a timetable that allows one to have commercial breaks to refresh their brain.
- Attention management strategies- Involves controlling working environments through technology, breaking down tasks, and setting aside time to rest and refresh the brain. Attention management enables one to focus on a particular task, become proactive, and maintain control.
- Limiting options- Can be achieved by being choosy in the available options. It is crucial to narrow down tasks that are of great importance. Choosing what is relevant through priority listing enables individuals to limit themselves to the most critical options.