

HUMAN SOCIALITY IN AN AGE OF INFORMATION GLUT: A LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Digital technologies have significantly expanded access to information, but they have also created conditions of excess that affect how people think, relate, and communicate. This paper examines human sociality in the context of information glut from a Library and Information Science perspective. It discusses how excessive information influences everyday interaction, trust, participation, and inclusion. The paper argues that information glut can weaken social relationships by placing pressure on attention, spreading misinformation, and reducing shared understanding. These effects are shaped by social and digital inequalities. The paper further highlights the role of libraries as trusted social institutions that support thoughtful engagement with information through information literacy, mediation, and inclusive services. It concludes that human-centred information practices remain essential for sustaining meaningful social relations in information-rich societies.

Keywords: Human sociality; information glut; information overload; library and information science; information behaviour; information literacy

Introduction

Contemporary society is experiencing an unprecedented flow of information. Digital technologies have transformed how information is created, shared, and consumed in everyday life. Individuals now encounter information from multiple sources at the same time, including news platforms, academic resources, social media, and personal communication channels. Unlike in the past, information is no longer only something people actively seek; it often reaches them continuously. This situation has given rise to what is commonly described as information glut.

Bawden and Robinson (2020) describe information glut as a condition in which the volume and speed of information exceed individuals' ability to process and use it effectively. Floridi (2018) explains that digital environments require constant judgment about relevance and credibility, which can become mentally exhausting. Over time, individuals may feel overwhelmed or disengaged, and these effects extend into social life. As Baym (2021) notes, human social life depends on shared attention, trust, and meaningful interaction. Information-rich environments often weaken these elements, leading to shallow communication and misunderstanding. From a Library and Information Science perspective, information glut is therefore not only a technological issue but also a social challenge.

Beyond the issue of volume, information glut also reflects a shift in how knowledge is experienced. Information is now encountered in fragmented forms short messages, headlines, and rapid updates rather than as sustained narratives. This changes not only how people access information but also how they interpret and remember it. In many

cases, individuals feel informed without having engaged deeply with any single source. Over time, this creates a surface-level understanding of complex issues, which can affect judgment, decision-making, and social interaction. From an information science perspective, this raises important questions about the quality of knowledge in an environment defined by speed and abundance.

This paper examines how information glut affects human social relationships, particularly in relation to attention, trust, interaction, and inclusion. It also highlights the role of libraries in addressing these challenges through information literacy, mediation, and inclusive services.

Human Sociality in Library and Information Science

Human sociality has always been central to Library and Information Science. The field is concerned with how people interact with information within social contexts. Libraries have traditionally served as communal spaces where knowledge is shared and interpreted. Wilson (1999) explains that information seeking is influenced by social and environmental factors, while Savolainen (2020) highlights that everyday information practices are shaped by routines and shared expectations. Information therefore carries social meaning and supports relationships and identity formation.

Baym (2021) observes that digital platforms blur the boundary between information exchange and social interaction. These platforms often prioritise speed over reflection, affecting the quality of communication. From an LIS perspective, information systems shape how people understand and relate to one another.

Information Glut and Information Behaviour

Information behaviour in an age of information glut is marked by strain. The main challenge is no longer access but meaningful engagement. Bawden and Robinson (2020) note that individuals often encounter information passively through digital feeds, reducing control and increasing pressure.

Metzger and Flanagin (2019) explain that individuals rely on simple cues when overwhelmed, such as familiarity or popularity. Savolainen (2020) observes that some users respond by avoiding information altogether, which may reduce stress but also limits participation. Floridi (2018) argues that these behaviours are shaped by the structure of information environments. Libraries respond by offering guidance, curated resources, and supportive spaces for engagement. Another important aspect of information behaviour in this context is the growing dependence on algorithm-driven systems. Many users are not fully aware of how digital platforms filter and prioritise information. As a result, what individuals see is often shaped by invisible processes rather than deliberate choice. This can create a false sense of control, where users believe they are exploring diverse information while actually encountering a limited range of perspectives. Over time, this affects not only what people know but also how they form opinions and interact with others.

Information Glut and Social Interaction

Social interaction depends on attention and shared meaning. Baym (2021) explains that constant exposure to information fragments attention and encourages quick responses

rather than thoughtful communication. Sunstein (2018) notes that information abundance encourages selective exposure, while Guess et al. (2020) highlight that overload can reduce civic engagement.

Jaeger et al. (2022) describe libraries as spaces that support dialogue and shared understanding, providing an important counterbalance to fragmented communication. In addition, the pace of information exchange has changed expectations around communication. There is increasing pressure to respond quickly, which leaves little room for reflection. Conversations that require careful thought are often replaced by brief and immediate reactions. This can weaken the quality of dialogue and reduce opportunities for understanding. In professional and academic settings, this shift may also affect how ideas are developed and shared, as depth is sometimes sacrificed for speed.

Information Literacy as a Social Practice

Lloyd (2017) argues that information literacy is a social practice shaped by relationships and shared understanding. Metzger and Flanagin (2019) explain that individuals rely on social cues when evaluating information. Nyhan and Reifler (2019) show that misinformation spreads within trusted networks. Head et al. (2020) highlight the importance of reflection and dialogue, which libraries support through collaborative learning.

It is also important to recognise that information literacy develops over time through experience and interaction. Individuals learn not only from formal instruction but also from observing how others engage with information in everyday situations. This

means that families, peer groups, and workplaces all play a role in shaping information practices. Where positive habits are encouraged such as, questioning sources and discussing ideas openly, information literacy is strengthened. Where such practices are absent, individuals may struggle to navigate complex information environments.

Jaeger et al. (2021) emphasise the inclusion dimension of information literacy, noting that libraries help users build confidence and participate meaningfully.

Trust, Misinformation, and Libraries

Lewandowsky et al. (2017) argue that information glut makes trust harder to maintain. Guess et al. (2020) note that repeated exposure to misinformation leads to disengagement. The Pew Research Center (2021) identifies libraries as trusted institutions. McGrew et al. (2019) show that libraries help users evaluate information and understand misinformation. Another challenge is that misinformation often spreads in ways that appear credible. It may be presented in professional formats or shared by trusted individuals, making it difficult to identify. This reinforces the importance of institutions that promote careful evaluation and critical thinking. Libraries, through their emphasis on neutrality and evidence-based practice, provide an important point of stability in an otherwise uncertain information environment.

Equity and Social Inclusion

Van Dijk (2020) explains that information glut affects individuals differently based on skills and access. Hargittai et al. (2019) note that disparities limit participation. In many cases, the effects of information glut are felt more strongly in communities with limited

access to education and digital resources. Without adequate support, individuals may rely on incomplete or unreliable information, which can affect important areas such as health, employment, and civic participation. Addressing these challenges requires not only access to technology but also sustained guidance and support in using information effectively.

Real et al. (2020) emphasise that libraries provide inclusive access and support, helping individuals engage effectively with information.

Issues in Information Glut

Information glut creates cognitive overload, reduces information quality, fragments attention, and increases inequality. These challenges affect both individuals and society. These issues are not isolated; they reinforce one another. For example, cognitive overload can make it harder to evaluate information, which in turn increases vulnerability to misinformation. Similarly, fragmented attention can reduce meaningful engagement, contributing to social division. Understanding these connections is important for developing effective responses that address both individual and societal dimensions of information glut.

The Role of Library and Information Science in Addressing Information Glut

Library and Information Science provides mediation, information literacy education, and curated services. Libraries create spaces for reflection and support inclusion. In this regard, the role of librarians is evolving. Beyond managing collections, librarians are increasingly involved in teaching, guiding, and supporting users in complex information environments. This shift reflects a broader understanding of the profession as one that

actively contributes to knowledge development and social well-being. By focusing on people as much as information, Library and Information Science remains central to addressing the challenges of information glut.

Recommendations

Information literacy programmes should be strengthened. Libraries should expand curated services and public awareness initiatives. Digital inclusion should be prioritised, and reflective information practices encouraged. Taken together, these recommendations point to the need for a more balanced approach to information use. Rather than simply increasing access, attention should be given to how information is experienced, understood, and shared. This requires collaboration between libraries, educational institutions, and policymakers to create environments that support thoughtful engagement and meaningful participation.

Conclusion

Information glut shapes social life and interaction. Libraries play a critical role in helping individuals engage thoughtfully with information and sustain meaningful relationships. Ultimately, responding to information glut requires a shift in perspective from focusing solely on access to prioritising understanding. Information is valuable not simply because it is available, but because it can be meaningfully used. Library and Information Science plays a critical role in supporting this shift by promoting practices that encourage reflection, dialogue, and inclusion. In doing so, it helps ensure that information

remains a resource for connection and understanding rather than a source of confusion and division.

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