

# DROWNING IN INFORMATION BUT STARVED FOR KNOWLEDGE

**K.S. Kalyani**

Librarian and Information Asst., Anna Centenary Library, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India  
kalyaks@gmail.com

**Ajit Prabhakaran**

Technical Officer, Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine, (CSIR-IIIM), Jammu, India  
ajitp@iiim.ac.in

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every human being right from the childhood asks questions to explore the world. Without question, learning can never happen. Without learning, knowledge creation stops. So, we are asking questions in the interest of knowing something new. The great scientist Einstein says, “The important thing is to never stop questioning”.



**Figure 1 Keep Questioning**

<http://www.dreamstime.com/stock-image-questions-brainstorming-decision-making-image21349731>



**Figure 2 Flow of process from Ask to Create**

Always questions are posed for want of information. The right information makes the human beings, intellectual thinkers and the best decision maker only when it is put to proper use. Informed with the right data and information, human beings can be intelligent designers of their future (Burke 1995; Diamond 2005).[1,2]

The great poet T.S.Eliot's famous lines from the poem “The Rock” wrote in the year 1934 perfectly matches to the information environment today.

Where is the life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in the information?

The professionals in the information industry have already quoted and heavily discussed about these wonderful verses. Yes, we say information transforms lives. Definitely, but relevant information properly utilized into knowledge alone can transform lives. Everywhere there is information. It is abundant; plenty; overloaded; beyond manageable and of course easily accessible via internet and other means. Thanks to the technology boom. But the question lies, whether the user can identify the authentic and quality information what he need. Enormous information creates chaos, it confuses the user community and often misguides them. Certainly, it also lacks quality control. World Wide Web provides all at a mouse-click but the knowledge industry finds it very difficult to manage and organize it. The serious challenge posed to the knowledge sector as well as the users is that everything is available but the prudence lacks. It is interesting to know that a collaborative effort from varied sectors have combined together to form a group called “Information Overload Research Group” [3] a non-profit organization which includes knowledge professionals, industry practitioners, academicians etc., to combat the burning issue.

## ABSTRACT

The challenge of today's knowledge society is to control, organize and manage the information which is enormous in its growth both in print and also in digital. The advent of technology embraces the information industry to stretch its wings till sky. It also finds ways and means, such as semantic web, data mining, etc. to combat information overload and participate in the user navigation process. The end user should be always aware in locating the quality information and enhance his/her knowledge. This article tries to analyze the critical issue and the utmost need of the instructional role to be performed by librarians and educators in imparting thinking skills.

**Keywords :** Information overload, questioning, knowledge workers, IORG.



Figure 3 The web page of IORG

## 2. INFORMATION OBESITY - IS IT GOOD?

Structured by the researchers. The given hypotheses may be formulated to conduct the present research as complex research questions have been structured here. A big data set always helps the researchers to explore the research gates where they can play well. An old saying in Tamil, “alavukku minjinaal amirthamum nanju”, which means even nectar turns into poison if its limits are exceeded, is best suited for the information explosion. Even if medicine when given beyond the dosage level, it creates the problem. It applies to information also. Wilson (1995) defines “Information Overload” as being presented with more information than can be absorbed, being burdened by a large supply of relevant information.[4] A lack of control can also affect the perception of Information Overload [5]. Many organizations are today drowning in information which is not well managed subsequently starving of knowledge and this underpins the importance of knowledge management. Knowledge is a poorly understood and thus undervalued resource (Burton-Jones, 1999).[6]

The exponential growth of information doesn't amuse the users, but it puzzles. “People are drowning in a sea of information,” says Blenhard (June 2007). In other words, can we say that, instead of having a safe journey in the knowledge ship people are sinking in the ocean of information. They consume more, but produce less. In his famous book, Know Can Do, Blenhard suggests that people should learn less information more often, rather than learn more information less often [7]. In other words, he says to consume less and create more.

## 3. INTERNET RULES, DOES LEARNING HAPPENS?

Searching for information on the internet is not always a joyful experience. Looking for what we want makes the surfers often tired. Definitely, not all the websites have valuable information. The Internet is a commercial zone where the producers market their information. The product may be of good quality or may not be. The consumer of the information should be aware of its worth and quality. Most importantly, many youngsters rely the internet as their primary source of information, but the literacy skill of evaluating the information resources is not appreciable.

My daughter who is in 9th class, prepares her school assignment on her own. She googles, consults Wikipedia, few websites and does her project papers within few hours. The world class Anna Centenary Library is nearby; when I used to tell her to visit the library and consult the books, she denies to go saying “everything I need is in internet”. This mindset of the children is really dangerous. Not only kids, I can say the college students also has the same view and hesitates to learn from books. Kindly note I said learn and not read.

Remember an old saying, “Give a man a fish and he can eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he can eat for a life time”. User community uses information but seldom learn. John Dewey's philosophy is that education begins with the curiosity of the learner. We should teach children to learn and allow children to think. Only then our children can have good decision making skills. In the words of Peter Drucker, “Knowledge can't be taught, but it can be learned”. [8]

## 4. ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

Where to apply and when to apply the information is knowledge. In words of revolutionary rational thinker Periyar, “Man is considered superior to other beings in this world, because he has a limitless capacity for knowledge. What we need today is the growth of knowledge, in order to advance in every field. Knowledge should have its sway”. [9]

People discover information in many ways. What is typically called “search” is distinguished by 3 characteristics; it is intentional, it is a monologue rather than a dialogue, and it places the initiative on the recipient. Search is a process pursued by human and machine together, not performed by a machine alone. Machines bring three unique capabilities; speed, scale and repeatability. Humans also bring three: intention, intelligence and decision. Without machines, the scope and effectiveness of human search would be severely constrained.[10] Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon rightly says, “What information consumes is rather obvious; it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it”. [11]

The real challenge to knowledge workers is to bring people into the learning environment. In Peter's writing, he did not separate knowledge from people. He wrote about the knowledge worker. He wrote about applying knowledge to what the knowledge worker does. He wrote the real impact of information and how it changes knowledge and the knowledge worker. Yet he did separate information from people. And he talked about people's challenge in sorting through information and identifying the most critical elements.

## 5. TEACH STUDENTS TO IDENTIFY, LEARN AND THINK

In the recent decades of information literacy, the librarian has the moral responsibility in imparting literacy skills to the students and users. They are not merely the managers of books and materials. Especially, the school librarians are highly focused as it is well known that learning has to be done at the grassroots that too at the school level. To be honest, major Indian schools lack interactive and dynamic library hours. Rote learning methods of education still exist. The joy of learning books is the missing link where the librarians should proactively involve. Help the children to move right in the information maze and assist them to be better learners. Teachers and librarians should be efficiently trained to handle the above mission.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

No doubt, information gets diluted due to its explosion. In his critical literacy and inquiry, Daniel Callison (2006)[12] suggests three rules to the users that not to believe everything they read, to read only what they already

believe and through a critical selection of what they read, hear and observe. It is said that information communicates fast, but truth reaches slow. The information literacy skills of the user community should be competent enough to choose the right, authentic and best after evaluation of resources. The information professionals should assist to enhance the critical thinking skills of the learners to make them travel in the path of knowledge.

Peter viewed knowledge as people-dependent and information as a storage house that people can tap into.

The Knowledge workers' role doesn't ends in navigating the users to access the books on the shelf or resources. It is much more expected. They have to play a role of instructor as well in meeting learning and teaching needs, especially the professionals at academic scenario. They have the responsibility of educating the students to think. Klaus quotes “the productivity of knowledge workers depends not only on handling information professionally, but also on the ability to structure knowledge of their field”.

## REFERENCES

1. Blanchard, K. (2007). *Know Can Do: Put Your Know-how Into Action*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
2. Burke, J. (1995). *Connections*. Little, Brown.
3. Burton-Jones (1999), *Knowledge Capitalism*, Oxford University Press, USA; pp. 248.
4. Callison, D., & Preddy, L. (2006). *The blue book on information age inquiry, instruction and literacy*. Libraries Unltd Incorporated.
5. Chatham, M.A. (2003, June). *Knowledge lost in information, In Report of the NSF Workshop on Research Directions for Digital Libraries* (Vol. 6.pp.15-17)
6. Diamond, J. (2005), *Guns, germs, and steel: The fates of human societies*. W.W. Norton.
7. Edersheim, E. H. (2007). *The Definitive Drucker*. McGraw-Hill.
8. Franz, H. 1998. "The Impact of CMC on Information Overload in Distributed Teams". Proceedings of the Thirty-First Annual Hawaii International Conference on Systems.
9. <http://iorgforum.org/about-iorg/> ( Accessed on 02.03.2014)
10. <http://www.staff.uni-giessen.de/~gk1415/revolutionary.htm>
11. Simon, H. A. (1971). *Designing organizations for an information-rich world in computers, communications, and the public interest*, The Johns Hopkins press.
12. Wilson, P. 1995. "Unused Relevant Information in Research and Development". *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, vol. 46, no. 1, p.45 - 51.

