



International  
**Wellbeing Insights**  
People, Culture & Wellbeing



**Stress Management Society**  
from distress to de-stress

# Living in a World of Information Overload



# Are We Living In An Age Of Information Overload?

In an time where information is abundant, and it has never been easier to access it than it is in the current day. With the wealth of information sitting at our fingertips, especially given the drive of the information becoming available online. There's no denying this information provides so many benefits and has propelled human development and intelligence through access to so much informative data to learn from.

Whilst the benefits are vast, there is a darker side that has been unveiling itself in recent years. When it comes to unwinding after a long day at work, often what we do is pull out yet another screen and consume even more information. Even if that's reading the news, listening to informative podcasts, networking, answering more emails or aimlessly scrolling on social media.

## The Proliferation of Information

The digital revolution has led to an exponential growth in the production and dissemination of information. The rise of the internet, the popularity of social media platforms and the expansion of digital technologies have contributed to the abundance of information. It can feel overwhelming to read and process the sheer volume of data when it's impossible in one's lifetime to ever consume it all. There is no end to the amount of data we could consume, and it can be hard to know when to stop. There can become a sense of perpetual incompleteness, of never being able to consume all available information.

## Cognitive Effects

Information overload can lead to our brain being constantly being bombarded with new material. Our brains can only handle so much and overwhelming its cognitive abilities can have negative consequences. Research has explored the effects of information overload on decision making.

There is evidence to suggest that when we are faced with high levels of information, the abilities to process complex tasks and make effective decisions are significantly impaired [1]. Information overload leads to reduced attentional resources, increased decision difficulty and heightened decision regret [2].



# Psychological Effects

The constant influx of information can have profound psychological implications too. A constant bombardment of information can overwhelm individuals, leading to heightened levels of anxiety and stress. Whether it's negative news content about terrible things happening around us, social media 'influencers' telling us how to live our lives, or simply the fear of missing out ensuring we are caught up to date on all things pop culture. Particularly, feelings of inadequacy can creep in as unrealistic expectations and self-comparisons can erode self-esteem.

Studies have explored and found evidence for these negative psychological impacts of information overload, including increased anxiety, stress, and diminished self-esteem [3].

## Coping mechanisms

There is simply no escaping this vast amount of information as it is ingrained in the modern world, but there are ways you can cope with distancing yourself from the negative spiral of effects it can bring.

### Set priorities:

When it comes to a bombardment of work emails, a huge to do list and so much information to take in and consider, it's essential to get your priorities straight. Spend some time identifying the most important tasks. Prioritise what truly matters to you and focus on those areas first. Consider what area you have control over and try to acknowledge, yet don't waste too much time worrying over things you simply have no control of changing.

### Focus on one thing at a time:

Putting your whole energy into just one task at a time will make you so much more productive than switching back and forth from tasks. The human brain simply cannot compute focusing using full energy into more than one thing at a time. It is not 'multitasking', it's simply switching from one activity.

### Practice digital detox

Take regular breaks from your devices. If you're taking a lunch break, go for a short walk, spend time in nature and designate this time to disconnect from technology and engage in offline activities. Give your brain the time and space to relax and reset each day. Seek and practice a balance and stay grounded and present in the moment. Embrace the richness of life beyond the screen.

[1] Falschlunger et al., (2016): InfoVis: The Impact of Information Overload on Decision Making Outcome in High Complexity Settings. SIGHCI 2016 Proceedings 3.

[2] Peng et al., (2021): How does information overload affect consumers' online decision-making process? An Event-related potentials study. Frontiers in Neuroscience.

[3] Swar et al., (2017): Information overload, psychological ill-being, and behavioral intention to continue online health information. Computers in Human Behavior.

