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TITLE: REIMAGINING INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Abstract

Consistent with the conference theme of “Understanding the Past and Building the Future,” the COVID-19 pandemic offers a lens for reimagining the discipline’s conceptual understanding of information overload. Usually framed as a psychological, cognitive, or emotional phenomenon, research emphasizes individual coping strategies, information seeking, decision-making, and productivity (Bawden and Robinson 2009, 183-5; Eppler and Mengis 2004, 330-4; Savolainen 2007, 614-5). However, greater attention could be given to the social and relational aspects of information overload. Emerging research is starting to address these effects specific to undergraduates’ experience of overload throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Cao et al. 2020, 3; Chang et al. 2020, 2-3; Händel et al. 2020, 8; Lui et al. 2021, 2-5). Using results from a recent survey of undergraduates at Western University, the proposed lightning talk will present potential directions for exploring the social and relational elements of pandemic-related overload.

The brief talk will explore how information overload, and consequently the strategies we use to mitigate it, may impact socially constructed perceptions of self, others, and our relative safety in the world (Chatman 1996, 203-4; McKenzie 2003, 20-21, 37). Interpreting the ever-changing glut of information will necessarily impact how we navigate COVID-19-related risks, policies, and information sharing within our relationships with others as well as with our social, cultural, and political bodies and institutions. Relational dynamics such as trust, authority, affinity, belonging, and respect will be explored. While public health policy has dictated some limits regarding in-person social interactions with others throughout the pandemic, the effect of COVID-19-related information sharing on the quality of those interactions is an exciting area for expanding the LIS discourse regarding information overload.

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