Chapter 7

Information and Communication Overload:
Can DigComp Help?

Margarida Lucas
University of Aveiro, Portugal

António Moreira
University of Aveiro, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Information and communication overload have gained a new dimension in today's digital world. The exposure to the volume of information being distributed has probably never been so high due to the rapid increase of communication channels at our disposal. Facing great volumes of information (and communication channels) may cause constraints in our personal and professional lives and therefore it requires the ability to deal with and solve the problems related with them. This chapter presents the DigComp, a tool that proposes a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are part of digital competence, one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning and essential for participation in our increasingly digitalised society. It takes the stance that the DigComp may work as a foundation for "calculating" the boundaries of that so-called overload. The intention is to find in this tool the right ally to gauge the acquisition of competences that will make any user more critically aware and proactive towards the ways s/he deals with communication and information in her/his daily routines.

INTRODUCTION

As information and communication are both vast and channeled through a variety of means and supports, they can induce overload. And this – information and communication overload – is a concept which has been around since the very beginnings of the discussion of publicity and marketing principles that lead practitioners in these areas to elect them as an object of study. However, due to the technological advances operated in the past few decades, studies on the subject have extended to other areas.

Our general purpose in this chapter is to introduce the reader to DigComp (Ferrari, 2013; Vuorikari, Punie, Carretero & Van den Brande, 2016), a common framework of reference that proposes 21 competences structured in five competence areas, the first two – "Information and data literacy" and "Communication and collaboration" being of particular interest for the present work. The framework, which is currently being fine-tuned, allows us to be able to describe each competence and attribute it a certain degree of skill in its performance, therefore establishing a relationship between the observed individual performance and the level at which the common framework of reference places its display. This comparison or gauging mechanism will eventually allow us to infer the areas of digital competence where overload may be prevented and/or detected, while at the same time offering a measure of individual performance. Although the measurement approach is not yet a reality, it is very possible that it will mimic what has been happening with other European Common Reference Frameworks of Competences (ECRFC) in other fields, especially the one that started this whole movement – the European Common Reference Framework of Competences for Languages (CEFR[1]) –, which involved renowned linguists, pedagogues, sociologists and sociolinguists, psycholinguists, language teaching methodologists, language policy makers and politicians in Europe. Relationships between digital competence dimensions and information and communication overload will be briefly exemplified and matched for clarification purposes, following the same principles and overall presentation display used in those other ECRFC.

Let us start with a few simple but enlightening examples to set the ground for the discussion that follows. In the early seventies of the last century, students taking courses in marketing and publicity were warned of the dangers of over-information, although over-communication was not an issue as such at the time. As it happens, whenever the issue of publicizing outdoors or even on the radio or television and print media, adequate "hits" to an adequate "public" under an adequate "format" to the "means of communication" was a rule of thumb to take into account and avoid overload, even if we were talking about the mere decoration of a shop window. What was essential was to be "clean", "lean", "catchy" and "memorable".

The explosion in means and forms of communication and the accrued load of unfiltered, "uncensored" information led to a double, intertwined overload: that of

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