Exploring the Inescapable Suffering Among Postgraduate Researchers:
Information Overload Perceptions and Implications for Future Research

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to get a deep understanding of the causes, effects, and remedies of information overload (IO) phenomenon among postgraduate scholars in the era of advanced internet technology. In-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus group interviews were implemented. Majority of the participants in this study exposed that IO represents real inescapable suffering that severely affects their research performance in different stages of their research. Time-consuming, cost, inferior research work, and poor personal health, isolation, low level of creativity and productivity are some of the major drawbacks resulted from IO. The collected data were thematically analysed using NVivo 12 software; the results were introduced five main themes that described information overload's forms, causes, consequences, and the ways to overcome IO phenomenon. Some practical insights and implications were provided to the decision-makers and professionals in higher education institutions to manage information overload and to reduce its negative effects among postgraduate students.

KEYWORDS

Higher Education, Information Overload, Postgraduate Students, Research Performance

INTRODUCTION

Information today is dramatically produced in our contemporary information society, accelerated and empowered by the high advancement of internet technology. As the former Google executive chairman Eric Schmidt stated that "the amount of information being created every two days is

equivalent to that created from the dawn of civilization until the year 2003" a. Information Overload is acknowledged explicitly as a problem in many international world-class academic conferences and assemblies. As the leading figure in information science, Maurice Line remarked: " the scientists would be overwhelmed, that they would be no longer able to control the vast amounts of potentially relevant material that were flowing from the world's presses, that science itself was under threat"(D Bawden & Robinson, 2020) .

Previous research conducted among postgraduate researchers revealed that information overload shows high possibilities to diminish the learning process. Too much information act as a distraction, therefore students face problem in selecting the exact information due to stress which influences students' performance and even causes some students to stop or withdraw from university (Mariamdaran & Veloo, 2017). The problem of information overload is receiving more attention, while there are less deeper studies and empirical researches for this problem, especially among university students (binti Suhaimi & binti Hussin, 2017).

This study contributes to the expansion of knowledge in the field of information overload management and higher education development by addressing three important issues. First, this study introduces an illustrative theoretical review about IO causes, effects, and remedies, connected with synthesized information thematically analyzed from collected data. Second, this study provides useful practical and theoretical implications as a guideline for supervisors, doctoral students and researchers in the same field. As well for research institutions' executive and managers about dealing with IO from a strategic level. Finally, by introducing the "implications and directions for further research", this study is expected to open the doors for other researchers for more empirical research opportunities in the same filed in different context using different methods and research approaches.

Background of the Study: Existing Knowledge About IO

In very simple words, the term "information overload" convey the concept of receiving too much information (Eppler & Mengis, 2003). Many studies in a different field of knowledge have been addressed the notion of information overload using variety expressions and synonyms, as cognitive overload(Junco, 2012; Mayer & Moreno, 2003), communication overload (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010), knowledge overload (Al-Shamsi, 2017), or information fatigue syndrome (Kabachinski, 2004). Interestingly, different authors in different field of sciences have introduced the concept of information overload in a different way. For example, research has been conducted about four areas of knowledge, namely accounting, marketing, organizational behavior, and management information systems, on how information overload concept was perceived in the last four decades. It revealed a variety of definitions about the phenomenon of information overload (Eppler & Mengis, 2003). Introducing a variety of definitions are appreciated and assumed to be logically and scientifically accepted, this is because different schools of thought, and it is relying on whether these definitions were based on objectively or subjectively view of point (Zhang, Zhao, Lu, & Yang, 2016). Therefore, the term 'information overload' has no single accepted definition agreed upon in the literature (D Bawden & Robinson, 2020; Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012).

Despite the fact, some authors define information overload as a mental condition experienced by the individuals and caused by an inability to process the information (Chen, Pedersen, & Murphy, 2012; Jacoby, Speller, & Kohn, 1974). On the other hand, others define it as too much amount of information (Klausegger, Sinkovics, & "Joy" Zou, 2007; Krishen, Raschke, & Kachroo, 2011). In regard to that, in the previous studies, four dimensions of information overload were identified as information processing capacity, information quality, information quantity, and available time. While the processing capacity was reported as the most significant dimension, available time was detected to be relatively less significant than the other three dimensions (Özkan & Tolon, 2015).

Information overload has been receiving great attention in many disciplines in the previous studies, while there is a scarcity of researches for this phenomenon and its causes, and effects in the context of universities and postgraduate students' performance. Yet, there are some debates in the

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