

2018

# The Overloaded Citizen

Natalie Cortino

*Xavier University - Cincinnati*, cortinon@xavier.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/undergrad\\_communication](https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/undergrad_communication)

---

## Recommended Citation

Cortino, Natalie, "The Overloaded Citizen" (2018). *Communication*. 4.  
[https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/undergrad\\_communication/4](https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/undergrad_communication/4)

This Blog is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate at Exhibit. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication by an authorized administrator of Exhibit. For more information, please contact [exhibit@xavier.edu](mailto:exhibit@xavier.edu).

## The Overloaded Citizen By: Natalie Cortino

It's impossible to deny that we as individuals experience some form of information overload on a day-to-day basis. Overcrowded social feeds, the bombardment of the 24-hour news cycle, and general digital noise make getting online a stressful experience for users. It is also impossible to deny that we play a large role in creating this digital kerfuffle. These online environments wouldn't exist if there were no demand for them. We voluntarily go to our Twitter and Facebook accounts, read through our overcrowded feeds, then follow more accounts, adding even further to our own information overload.



So perhaps we're looking at information overload all wrong. Our current understanding of information overload creates the image of a frazzled consumer who can't withstand the sheer amount of information that they receive when on various digital platforms. However, as a culture we've developed the skills to consume the massive quantities of information that we're receiving at a given moment. Thanks to free will and the "unfollow" button, we have the ability to meticulously curate our digital spaces. . To some degree, we've learned to cope. Yet, many of us still feel overwhelmed by information overload. I argue that the information overload taking shape has less to do with the quantity of content and more about quality.

When I first was crafting my Twitter feed I wanted to follow users that I knew, but I also (like many others) wanted to use the platform to keep up with current events, pop culture, and certain celebrities/influencers. What I wasn't prepared for was the barrage of "hot takes" that would dominate my feed every time those things intersected. Both these everyday Twitter users and oft-called "Twitter elite" are eager to broadcast their opinion as the end-all-be-all way to think the second any news drops. I'm suddenly left in the dust still trying to put together the facts, only to be bombarded by tirades of people I don't really know. My mind was cluttered with each of these opinions, muddling my own decision-making process and introducing a new level of anxiety every time I picked up my phone.



@theferocity sums up my feelings pretty nicely here

In our own way, each of us is on a desperate quest to be the perfect “informed citizen”. That’s why we follow every account, ingest every news article, and Google ‘til our fingers fall off. [Historically](#), this term was used by founding father Thomas Jefferson, who believed the government couldn’t function properly with an ill-informed citizenry. Now it has taken on new life to represent the individual who has (seemingly) well-informed opinions about most events, movements, news stories, etc. as soon as they occur. Sociologist [Alfred Schutz](#) said “it is the well informed citizen who considers himself perfectly qualified to decide who is a competent expert and even to make up his mind after listening to expert opinions.” And although his words are somewhat antiquated, this basic idea of the informed citizen still rests on the consolidation of opinions.

So how do we find solace online? The easy solution to information overload is a digital detox, where you can cleanse your feed of any bad juju or just ditch social media altogether. But by avoiding the natural discourse you forfeit your role as an informed citizen. And if you’re not the impeccably informed citizen, as you originally set out to be, there again rears a horrible anxiety that leaves you feeling ill-equipped and out of touch. It’s a vicious cycle with no end.

Maybe there is no solution. As we continue to digitally evolve, perhaps we’ll be able to evolve with it and learn to siphon the expert opinions from the garbage ones.

Or maybe we’ve had enough. We’ve taken these social platforms to their zenith and ravaged them. Whether it’s on Twitter or Snapchat, slowly but surely, user numbers will dwindle until it’s declared “dead” by the rest of the Internet. All I know is: I’ll probably still be online, watching it all crumble.