

The way in which we communicate is evolving

My brain is tired, and yet it is hungry. It is a paradox that is by no means unique, but it is certainly exhausting, and I'm willing to bet most people would agree they're in the same proverbial boat. And that boat is pretty easily whelmed, be it over or under.



Taazima Kala-Essack is lead PR consultant, FCB Wired Botswana.

Knowledge and information have never before been so easily accessible, inclusive or extensive. However, the always-on-information-super-age-and-hyper-connected-world is also, well, a lot!

According to The Radicati Group Inc., based in the United States, the average working professional used to receive 121 emails per day in 2014. At the time, they projected this would increase to 140 emails per day in 2018.

We're in 2019 and I asked one of my "busiest" colleagues what the traffic into his inbox is like on a typical day – upwards of 180, not including spam. If we assume an eight-hour day at work (as if, but let's just go with it), that is approximately 23 emails every hour, or, to take it at an even more granular level, approximately two emails every four minutes.

To help prove my point about how we have too much information, here's more overwhelming information to take in (all data 2018, via CNET):

- Every day, WhatsApp users send approximately 65 billion messages.

- More than 2 billion minutes of voice and video calls are made every day on WhatsApp.
- 450 million people use WhatsApp Status every day.
- 1 billion people use the Facebook messaging app each day.
- A study of advertising exposure (by Media Dynamics Inc.) shows that the typical adult's daily media consumption has grown from 5.2 hours in 1945 to 9.8 hours today. The average adult is exposed to 360 adverts a day (across all media platforms), yet only 150-155 of these are actually "noted" or make any sort of impression. This doesn't even include Instagram, Twitter or Facebook adverts or paid posts!

As the world would have it, we are required to consume information in greater volumes and greater speeds to attain a sound education, to constantly remain ahead of the vocational pack, and even simply to keep up with others. Our desperate need to "keep up" transcends into the very ecosystem we find ourselves in. How, you wonder? Well ...

Our news is changing, our media is changing, and the very way in which we communicate is evolving. We want to stay abreast of all that remains important and relevant – politics, current affairs, human interest stories, lifestyle fads and trends. Yet, at the same time, we must grapple with watercooler gossip, fake news, and bubbles of information that, by their very definition, ought to be informative, and yet serve no meaningful purpose. I'm happy that I know that, contrary to their reputation, sloths do not sleep 90% of their day away and instead have an average sleep duration of 10 hours per day. But knowing this sort of information hardly adds value to my daily personal or work life beyond banal small talk. Social media and the real time access to information at the touch of a keyboard click have only made this more real – good, bad and ugly.

When we find ourselves drowning in a pool of information we do not necessarily need, we have to swim our way up to the surface. It's information overload we can all relate to, much like when Microsoft Word for Mac gives your system too much information (it'll show you that the ominous Apple wheel of death thingy; information overload; system error; call it what you will - but I've started alternating between terming it emotional bandwidth or intellectual bandwidth). You have to filter the information most useful to you, and know when too much is too much. And so, we find ourselves literally having to learn how to differentiate crucial information and non-essential information; must-have and must-know as compared to the fleeting "that's kinda cool" anecdotes and whimsical facts. It means almost re-wiring, consciously, what we want or need to learn, and how we learn it.

Read a story about Beyoncé in a glossy mag and enjoy it in the moment, but do not let it go beyond that (Note to Beyhive, Bey is queen!), whilst an editorial about how artificial intelligence stands to reinvent our diamond industry or manufacturing sector sticks like... well, something really sticky. It's almost akin to the GI Joe Fallacy Laurie Santos and Tamar Gendler coined, wherein knowing truly is not half the battle. Our cognitive biases mean that just because we know something is not good, not relevant or not positive, this does not mean we inherently steer away from it.

We need to consciously fight the bias, fight the urge, and rewire what our mind tells us we want or think we want. In a nutshell, identify the information that is most relevant to you and your purpose, and actively choose to remember and learn it. Note it, highlight it, make positive mindful associations around it, and enhance your ability to recall at any given moment.

With this hyper-connected, information everywhere world we find ourselves in, we have created our very own perfect storm for working people: a fine balance between educated and informed in a manner that spells productive and value-adding team members, or, the alternative, incessantly useless facts and quips that, hours later, don't help us move from A to B even on a prayer.

The paradox exists, we can all admit. So how are we investing in ensuring that the information super-age we celebrate is more helpful than harmful? Maybe, as we invest our time, effort and money into educating ourselves and others, we need to become even more mindful of the importance of learning *how to learn* and feeding our hungry brains productively, so that the proverbial boat is less likely to tip over.

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