Chapter 7

Information Overload as a Challenge and Changing Point for Educational Media Literacies

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the concept of information overload as a crucial element of the changing information environment. Against this background, the authors discuss an alternative process for the conceptualisation of educational media literacy. By combining two nationally-based concepts on media literacy (German and Anglo-American), the yield of such a transnational approach will be demonstrated. The first section is dedicated to a historical overview. Based on the observation that humanity is currently dealing and always has dealt with information overload, leads to the necessity of coping with said overload. To this end, the second section will present and didactically reduce both discourses to their essentials. The third section provides a possible conceptualisation of both concepts and practical application of the combined approach for scholastic learning. The aim of this paper is to stimulate an international exchange on media literacy.

THE CHALLENGE OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Clay Shirky, media professor at New York University, said at the Web 2.0 Expo in New York in 2008, "It's not information overload. It's filter failure" (Shirky, 2008). This paper aims at demonstrating, that humanity is and always has been dealing with information overload. From an educational standpoint, the solution to so called information overload "revolve[s] around the principle of taking control on one's

information environment" (Bawden & Robinson 2009, p. 187). Digital media change the information environment. This is due to many factors, including the changing places of knowledge and their authorities or simply the technological basis of digital media. It is the responsibility of education media literacies to tackle these factors and to give adequate recommendations for action related to information appropriation with digital media. This understanding of information overload leads directly to the discussion about information literacy.

The present chapter outlines the possibilities to cope with information overload by bolstering the competencies of media users. Therefore, the authors will discuss an approach to face the changing information environment for educational media literacies without abandoning originally educational ideals. The first section is dedicated to a historical overview of the said information overload. The approach points out the theoretical foundation of the German theorem of competence as well as Anglo-American literacy research. To this end, the second section will present and didactically reduce both discourses to their essentials. By using the information landscape in digital media, the possibilities of a mutual complement of both specific nationally-characterised approaches will be demonstrated in the third section. Furthermore, this section provides practical application of the combined approach for scholastic learning. The authors assume that combining both concepts will result in an important contribution to the research field. Combining the German literacy approach with the Anglo-American one means integrating subject-orientated ideals into a concept which is naturally based on users' activities in the media environment. The subject-orientated ideals refer to the confident and independent handling of digital media, which implies a reflexive distance to the way information is generated by digital media. This distance enables the use of digitised information in relation to subjective demands and living environments. This criterion of literacy is called media critique (Ganguin, 2004, 2006, 2014). The pragmatical approach can be used to identify specific "top-down"-challenges caused by the way digital media have changed the manner of generating and presenting digitised information. The management of information will continue to prefer pragmatic solutions. But for an educational approach on information literacy, which tries to implant idealistic values on education, the scope of digitised information should extend to looking for possibilities to use the current state of the information landscape.

Information Overload History

People have been discussing communication or information overload since and during the rise of each new media. The authorities, who foster or inhibit information overload, are changing, with it, and so the structures and challenges for the users do. Therefore, the chapter is dedicated to emerging challenges for media literacy because it is not just necessary what or which, but also *how* digital media are and how they are dealt with by people.

People have been exposed to an overload of information, from which they need to make selections, since the dawn of humanity. Whether the invention of letterpress printing, the telephone, or photography, people have faced a "regretted inability to read" (Bawden & Robinson, 2009, p. 182), listen or watch. The rise of digital media, where watching, listening and reading are familiar practices and especially with the implementation of the social web as a user-generated database, gives the impression that this 'regretted inability' is growing immeasurably to an information overload. Stimulus satiation as sensory overload does not necessarily depend on media, but media visualise them and improve their transparency, making the information quantifiable, showing them "in cold print". For this, media are reproductions of reality as well as they are part of reality throughout their possibilities to act with them, both techni-

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