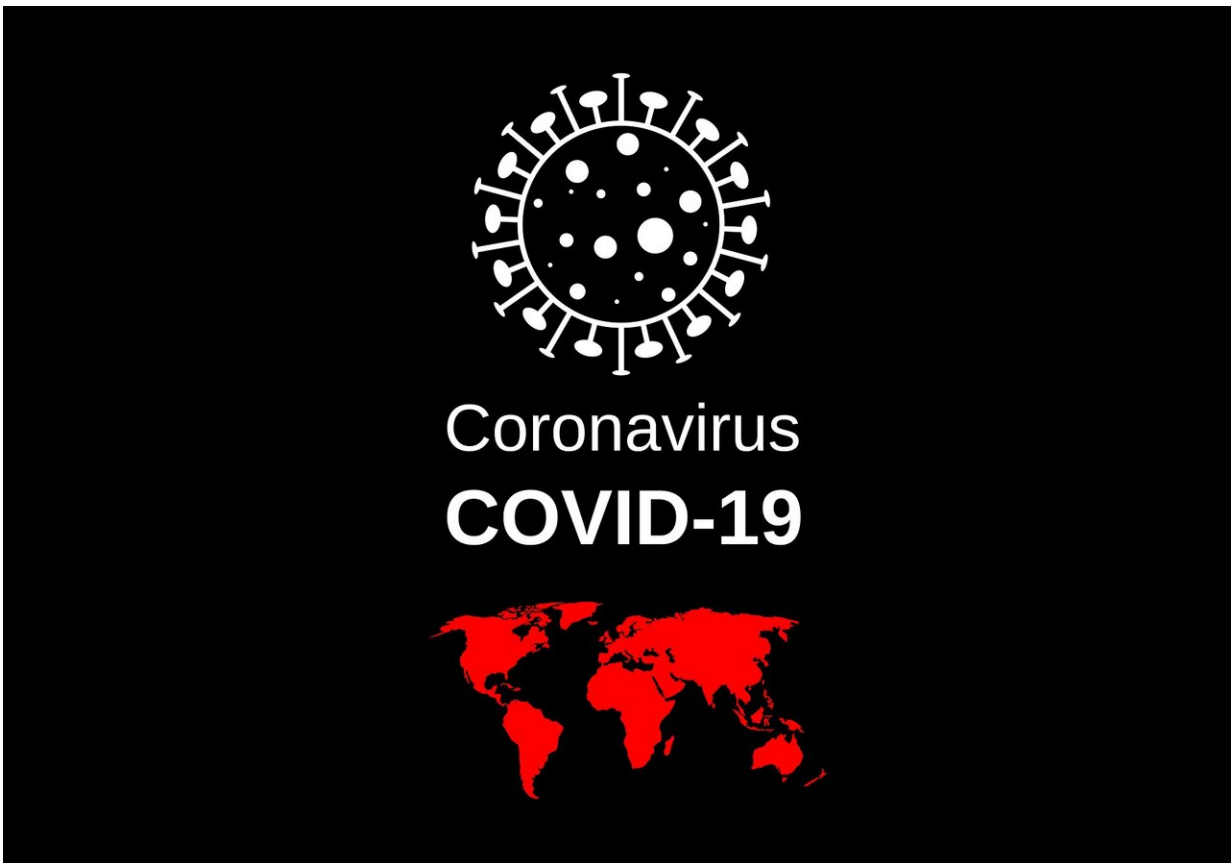


COVID-19 information overload leads to simple but unhelpful choices

April 1 2020



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That the COVID-19 situation has been accompanied by a relentless flood of information is evident from a quick examination of newspaper front pages, top stories on any news channel, or trending topics on

Twitter.

The TMI (too much [information](#)) effect has led to the danger of information [overload](#),—a phenomenon studied for over twenty years by Professor David Bawden and Dr. Lyn Robinson of City University of London's Department of Library and Information Science.

Overload occurs when too much relevant information is arriving, particularly when it comes through the 'homogenising' lens of the web browser, which makes it difficult to distinguish which information is reliable and helpful. It leads people to feel overwhelmed and powerless, and causes anxiety, fatigue, and paralysis of action; bad enough at any time, dangerous in a pandemic.

In their chapter contribution, 'Information Overload: An Overview', to be published in the Oxford Encyclopedia of Political Decision Making (Oxford University Press 2020), they state:

" 'Push' services, particularly on ambient mobile devices, have added greatly to the perception of overload, with information being constantly 'imposed' without being sought. The ubiquity of mobile devices has added to the always-on syndrome, often associated with [information overload](#)."

Professor Bawden and Dr. Robinson also say that in response, people seek simple, and often unhelpful, ways of choosing which information to focus on; even to the extent of just avoiding information completely.

"We know we should use reliable sources—the [health services](#), the government, academic sources such as John Hopkins University's coronavirus dashboard—but it is often easier to rely on our social media bubbles. Worse, faced with such a seemingly unending stream of information there is a tendency to pick out the bizarre and sensational;

reading that the coronavirus was genetically engineered by the Illuminati as a means of world domination, but that it can be defeated by drinking hot water, is somehow more attractive than seeing more sensible reminders about staying in and handwashing."

Provided by City University London

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