



National Academies Keck Future Initiative: The Informed Brain in a Digital World: Interdisciplinary Team Summaries

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Digital media provide humans with more access to information than ever before—a computer, tablet, or smartphone can all be used to access data online and users frequently have more than one device. However, as humans continue to venture into the digital frontier, it remains to be known whether access to seemingly unlimited information is actually helping us learn and solve complex problems, or ultimately creating more difficulty and confusion for individuals and societies by offering content overload that is not always meaningful.

Throughout history, technology has changed the way humans interact with the world. Improvements in tools, language, industrial machines, and now digital information technology have shaped our minds and societies. There has always been access to more information than humans can handle, but the difference now lies in the ubiquity of the Internet and digital technology, and the incredible speed with which anyone with a computer can access and participate in seemingly infinite information exchange. Humans now live in a world where mobile digital technology is everywhere, from the classroom and the doctor's office to public transportation and even the dinner table. This paradigm shift in technology comes with tremendous benefits and risks. Interdisciplinary Research (IDR) Teams at the 2012 National Academies Keck Futures Initiative Conference on The Informed Brain in the Digital World explored common rewards and dangers to Humans among various fields that are being greatly impacted by the Internet and the rapid evolution of digital technology.

Keynote speaker Clifford Nass of Stanford University opened the dialogue by offering insight into what we already know about how the "information overload" of the digital world may be affecting our brains. Nass presented the idea of the "media budget," which states that when a new media emerges, it takes time away from other media in a daily time budget. When additional media appear and there is no time left in a person's daily media budget, people begin to "double book" media time. Personal computers, tablets, and smartphones make it easy to use several media simultaneously, and according to Nass, this double-booking of media can result in chronic multitasking, which effects how people store and manage memory. Although current fast-paced work and learning environments often encourage multitasking, research shows that such multitasking is inefficient, decreases productivity, and may hinder cognitive function. *National Academies Keck Future Initiative: The Informed Brain in a Digital World* summarizes the happenings of this conference.

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