

Thanks to social networks, such as Twitter, information can spread around a lot faster. People can easily connect to others or sharing similar interests; Exchanges among peers make information circulating more relevant. But the downside of social networks is that they do not help to cope with what many of us do experience: information overload. On the contrary, the speed of the real-time web is breathtaking.

### Is Twitter making us stupid?

In addition to the famous article “ [Is Google making us stupid?](#) ” , which is still very relevant, Nicholas Carr wonders what happens to our brain when dealing with so many little pieces and snippets of information? How can we make sense of it all and how shall our brain process the flow of social media or user generated content? With the real-time web we face at the latest some limitations. It is impossible to follow the pace of information in a wider context.

But in the article [Social learning in the 21st century](#) Richard Lalleman comes up with an interesting statement: “

*Information*

*overload and fragmented knowledge are more useful than useless. Firstly, because they result in unexpected opportunities. They create less limited boundaries to the scope of your view and, as a result, make it more likely that you may find things you did not even think to look for*

.”

### Reducing complexity: Patterns, scanners and filters

So, is the social web helping us to deal with all the information? Since the beginning of the Internet people have surfed to the world wide web to have free access to information which is updated, varied and coming from vast range of sources. Mailing lists are, for example, still an invaluable source of information. [Nancy White](#) sees different roles for people in networks. [In an interesting interview](#)

she speaks about filter and scanner. “

*If you look back in network theory, this idea of the filter and the scanner has been around for a long time. Now the person who is good at filtering or scanning can totally change both the community and the network*

.”

{youtube}KopefQZ\_Luk{/youtube}

[Pete Kruse](#) , a German professor of psychology, says the only way to reduce complexity or the mass of information is to look at patterns. Journalism is exactly that. It compromises patterns

out of an ocean of information. But what if there is not a journalist writing about my topic and no community with scanners and filters?

### **Monitoring the web: News radar**

There are some clever tools to build information streams to monitor certain topics on the web.

[Howard Rheingold has an excellent video series](#)

on how to build a news radar, which requires as minimal technical knowledge as possible. At the end of his video he comes up with an appreciated conclusion: You need to decide on what you want to focus on. Your time is limited, so find the right balance. In my personal experience one needs to only follow a fraction of sources or the right network hubs because valuable information comes from many sources and will reach you eventually.

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