History of Information

- early history of the word
- restricted uses
- opening up & counting
- too much information
"On an average weekday, the New York Times contains more information than any contemporary of Shakespeare's would have acquired in a lifetime"
how much information?
how much information?

King James Bible, c 1611: 0
how much information?

King James Bible, c 1611: 0

Shakespeare, 1564-1616: 2
how much information?

King James Bible, c 1611: 0

Shakespeare, 1564-1616: 2

"this is one Lucio's information against me"

Measure for Measure
how much information?

King James Bible, c 1611: 0

Shakespeare, 1564-1616: 2

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Measure for Measure
how much information?

King James Bible, c 1611: 0

Shakespeare, 1564-1616: 2

"this is one Lucio's information against me"
Measure for Measure

"But reason with the fellow
Before you punish him, where he heard this,
Lest you shall chance to whip your information
And beat the messenger who bids beware."
Coriolanus
how much information?

King James Bible, c 1611: 0

Shakespeare, 1564-1616: 2

"this is one Lucio's information against me"

Measure for Measure

"But reason with the fellow
Before you punish him, where he heard this,
Lest you shall chance to whip your information
And beat the messenger who bids beware."

Coriolanus
coming into the language

hard words

Information, (lat.) an informing, telling, or making known.

Infomatus non sum, a formal answer, made by an Atturny, that is commanded by the Court to say what he thinks good in defence of his Client Edward Philips, The New World of English Words, 1658
"go to the poets"

17th to 18th century

John Milton (1608-1674) 0
Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) 1
John Dryden (1631-1700) 2
Alexander Pope (1688-1744) 6

Daniel Defoe (1660?-1731) 20
Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) 28
"Dacier observes that this is added by Homer not for our information, for we already know it"

**Alexander Pope, Odyssey, 1725-26**
whose information?

"Dacier observes that this is added by Homer not for our information, for we already know it"

Alexander Pope, *Odyssey*, 1725-26

"a difference that makes a difference"

Gregory Bateson, 1979
"Dacier observes that this is added by Homer not for our information, for we already know it"

Alexander Pope, *Odyssey*, 1725-26

"a difference that makes a difference"

Gregory Bateson, 1979

"Who wants yesterday's papers"

Rolling Stones, 1967
new word, new world

a few years later ...

he received information
information was given to
having received information
he procured good information
he gave information
information he had received
Clinton then received information
a letter, giving information

Jedidiah Morse, *The History of America*,
Philadelphia, 1795
how much information?
"how much information?"
"How much information would we not be deprived of if there was no night?"
--Sturm, 1791

"These early extracts ... show how much information he derived from this excellent writer."
--Biographical Dictionary, 1798

"How much ingenuity might be displayed, and how much information communicated by a professor."
Clarke, 1796
GREELEY'S TRAVELS IN EUROPE.--GLANCES AT EUROPE: In a series of Letters from GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, ITALY, &c. By HORACE GREELEY. Octavo, cloth; price, one dollar. This volume comprises the observations made during Mr. Greeley's recent European tour, on Society, Manners and Customs, Art, Literature, Agriculture, Foreign Politics, and a great variety of other attractive and exciting topics.

It has copious notices of the Great Exhibition or World's Fair in London; complete descriptions of the Cultivation of the Soil in different countries; brilliant Criticisms of the Works of Art in the great European Capitals; and graphic sketches of Public and Domestic Life in London, Paris, Rome, &c., written in the frank, straightforward, piquant style for which Mr. Greeley is widely celebrated.

A more authentic, instructive, and amusing Book of Travels has probably never been issued from the American press. The vast amount of information which it contains is presented in such a lively and off-hand manner that the perusal of the volume becomes as interesting as a novel.

Whoever would obtain a fresh, Daguerrreotype view of the present state of England, should not fail to make himself acquainted with its contents. Even the discussion of the driest topics, which it sometimes takes up, is enlivened with such frequent flashes of humor, and pervaded with such genial and sparkling vivacity, that no one who commences the volume can lay it down without finishing its perusal.
old fears

who said and when?

"It will soon be the employment of a lifetime merely to learn [books'] names. Many a man of passable information at the present day reads scarcely anything but reviews, and before long, a man of erudition will be little better than a mere walking catalogue."
old fears

who said and when?

"Even for studies, where expenditure is most honorable, [developing large libraries] is justifiable only so long as it is kept within bounds. What is the use of having countless books, and libraries whose mere titles their owners can scarcely read through in a whole life time?"
what did it?

printing
books
libraries
...

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Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions ... this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality."

(Plato, *Phaedrus*)

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