

Generation Z and the evolution of scientific journals

During his lifetime, Charles Darwin sent at least 7,591 letters and received 6,530. Albert Einstein, in turn, sent over 14,500 and received more than 16,200.¹ This means that they wrote, respectively, 0.59 and 1.02 letters every day in the last 30 years of their lives. Such impressive display of discipline compels one to imagine that the number of messages exchanged by them would be particularly astronomical if they had lived in the age of email and social networks. In 2010, it is estimated that in emails only, excluding spam, approximately 4.5 messages were sent out worldwide per day per capita.²

This increase in human interaction has forcibly reduced messages size. So much so that the golden rule of email etiquette demands briefness and conciseness.³ This increasing shrinkage of exchanged messages is among the factors that set the stage for the success of social networks. Prolixity would never have allowed this phenomenon to emerge. In virtual environments information is transferred swiftly, often deploying resources that go beyond the written word. Ideas — both good and bad — are spread through words, images, videos and sounds, which can be used in isolation or not.

The internet and social networks have brought to light several simultaneous phenomena. Among these is the so-called Generation Z, which shares information in a compartmentalized manner as if each compartment was but a piece of the overall puzzle. No one is interested in assembling the whole puzzle. People just want to separate the parts that arouse their interest and provides themselves with the desired knowledge. Thus, consistency between the parts is not given by textual elements but by individual curiosity, the specific interest of each person.

That's why long informative texts have become so boring. Extracting meaningful content simply takes too long. It is a matter of cost-benefit. Why spend time trying to grasp what could be learned in minutes?

These selection pressures led to the evolution of a wide range of hardware and software technologies. To cite just one example, most current mobile phones — which have been expanded into tablets — were developed to meet the need for this information flow. They are not just phones. They give access to social networks, restaurant guides, GPS, email, games, etc. They are mini entertainment and communication centers.

Generation Z has never envisioned the planet without computers, chats, mobile phones. Their mindset was influenced from birth by a fast-track, complex world materialized by technology and they, therefore, conceive of a world devoid of geographical boundaries. They have reached the age of consumer decisions.

They consume video games, but also cars, real estate, e-books and, obviously, scientific literature.

All these selection pressures have come into play in the area of scientific journals, and are bound to keep pushing harder and harder. Whoever fails to keep track of this obvious reality is doomed to extinction.

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To be accepted, articles will have to limit the number of words to 3,500, including title, abstract and references. Authors are encouraged to utilize a wealth of multimedia resources and use the power of the Dental Press Portal to tap into these resources. Information not essential to the understanding of the article will be appended on the web, shedding light on key content. We will further strengthen the importance of clinical information by including a section in the article entitled Clinical Relevance. In this new section, authors will be able to highlight the key points in their study that can somehow improve clinical practice. Something along the lines of "evidence-based clinical tips." Finally, the authors will be encouraged to prepare questions for inclusion in the online version of their article. The goal is to give readers the chance to test their knowledge while encouraging teachers in undergraduate and graduate courses to expose their students to these themes.

Einstein once said that "it is important never to stop questioning." Only then can we truly evolve and accomplish something that really makes a difference.

Good reading!

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3. Email etiquette. [Cited 2011 July 14]. Available from: <http://www.emailreplies.com/>