

Editorial: Socially-responsible media: #totweetornottotweet?

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Editorial

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Language is wonderful! One of my favourite examples as a Cambridge graduate is to hear the word Caius (as in the College, Gonville and Caius), which is pronounced kēs, in exactly the same way as keys. And quays. Three words, three different initial letters, three entirely different meanings but only one sound, yet we call this communication! Although there is much debate as to when the first spoken languages evolved, the general view is that it must have occurred in excess of 100 000 years ago (Fig. 1). The first written language, by contrast, emerged approximately the same time before the start of the Common Era (Sumerian, 3500 BCE) as we are now after it (well, to an order of magnitude!) Language evolves all of the time, which in general is a good thing. As an example, I have just used BCE rather than BC as a more accurate reflection of modern global values (although they are the same). And I (twice now) started a sentence with the word ‘and’, something I was taught never to do. Other significant timepoints in the development of communication are illustrated in Fig. 1. Social media is a form of communication that has become commonplace in only the last two decades, although the principle of communicating a simple message to a large group of people can be traced back at least 5000 years to the first known bells, and smoke signals are another ancient example. Social media could also be considered wonderful: to find the first piece of information quoted here I simply searched for ‘origin of language’ and had a result in seconds. Some may not agree with all of the detail provided in the figure or this text. Frankly, I do not give a damn: I have a point to make and I will make that point. Or rather, I have just made it! There is a downside to social media, which has recently become extremely evident in the way that even the highest levels of politics are conducted: (s)he who shouts loudest is likely to be heard and be influential, even if the information that is conveyed is dubious or worse. Perhaps we should expect nothing better for, after all, one definition of medium (as a noun) is ‘a person who says that they can receive messages from people who are dead’. The word is, in itself, another example of the complexities of language, since it can be a means of communication (noun), can be an adjective (neither the highest or the lowest) and as a noun can have a different meaning that is important in dairy research as ‘a substance that something grows in, lives in, or moves through’ or, in the plural, ‘Cultivation media for lactic acid bacteria used in dairy products’, which just happens to be a review article in this issue of the *Journal of Dairy Research* (I am deliberately not going to cite the article as a test of the power of social media: search for Hayek and the title). Phew, a long sentence! Did it communicate? Scientific journals are a form of social media, in that they convey information to a society or community. There are systems in place for trying to ensure that the information is correct, and in addition the medium (hardcopy print or online electronic file) is deliberately targeted to a specific group, although the Open Access concept would imply otherwise. As a research medium *Journal of Dairy Research* has existed for almost 90 years, the first volume being published in 1930. If this was a social media ‘blog’ I would leave it at that, but as a contribution to a scientific Journal I should be absolutely accurate and say that the first issue actually appeared exactly 90 years ago, in November 1929. During the coming year we shall celebrate the anniversary in a number of ways, one of which is to increase the number of articles that are freely available to read. I can already mention that all of the review articles published in the last two volumes are included in that as Key Reviews. In the last few years we have embraced the new communication technologies and, I hope, built a closer relationship with our community of researchers and readers. That now includes social media: since our last issue we have created a JDR Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/OurJDR>) which we hope you will follow and JDR Groups on LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13748718/>) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OurJDR#>) which we hope you will join. There are links on both the Community and Cambridge Core homepages as well, and if you already use Twitter you can find us with #JDairyRes Our objectives are simple: to improve our communication with our core scientific audience whilst also broadening our dissemination to include the lay audiences that use social media and search engines. Whilst many scientists appear to have reservations about social media (I have previously included myself in that category), to do otherwise would be to abandon our founding principles; in 1929 there were clear needs for dairy research to feed a global population decimated by war, and the Journal was established with those societal needs foremost. Ninety years later the need to feed a growing population is just as great, but the clarity of the role that dairy

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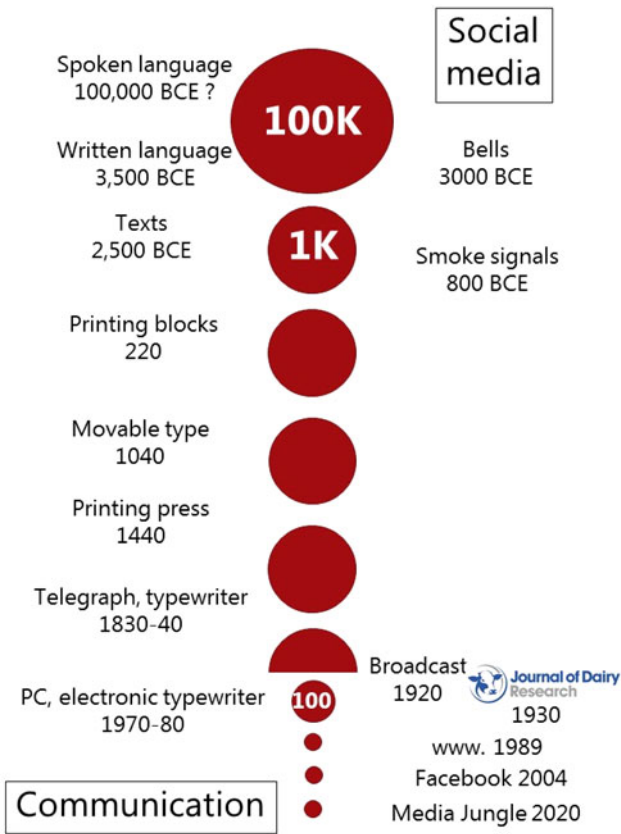


Fig. 1. Schematic timeline illustrating the development of communication and of social media. The circles represent time intervals according to a non-linear order of magnitude scale from 100=000 to 10 years: 10=000 is missing.

could play is blurred by misconceptions and plain mistruths about environmental and consumer health costs. FAO recently celebrated World Food Day and JDR joined those celebrations through social media. Naturally, we highlighted milk. In publishing the official figure of 2.7% of global GHG coming from the dairy industry, FAO acknowledge that we are not the environmental ogre that some would claim, and they also acknowledge that dairy is an important part of a balanced diet (FAO statement: *milk is a major source of dietary energy, high-quality protein and fat...and makes a significant contribution to intakes of calcium, magnesium, selenium, riboflavin, vitamin B12 and pantothenic acid*). Regrettably, I was struck by an almost complete absence of dairy from the FAO World Food Day 2019 social media outputs, and the internet allowed me to quickly identify that dairy has not figured prominently in any of those same annual outputs over the whole of the last ten years or so. My point is simple. I have no doubt that FAO have their own good reasons for making milk invisible, but we have equally good (probably much better!) reasons for making it as visible as possible. So, please join with us in our socially-responsible use of social media to promote the cause of the Journal and of dairy as an essential part of global food security. Tweet, comment, post, tag, like, retweet, chat and all the rest of it. Yes, it is a media jungle out there, but if we don't participate we shall be left behind.