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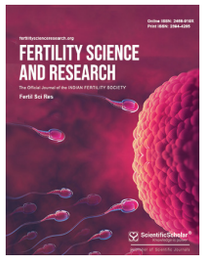

Guest Editorial

Support Your Journal

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DO WE LIVE IN POST GUTENBERG PERIOD?

One of the most devastating wars in Europe was the so-called 30 Years War (1618–1648). In some parts of Europe, nearly 50% of the population perished. The war can partly be regarded as a conflict between the Catholic Church and Protestants. It has been said that a strong contributing factor was the advent of the Gutenberg printing press. Books used to be handwritten, primarily by monks in monasteries, and usually had a clear Christian message. This meant that the Church had almost complete control over written information. Books were rare and extremely expensive; only the authorities and the wealthy had books. The public was taught that all written information was to be trusted as it came from an authoritative source. This changed when "everyone" could print a book; information could be distributed freely without the strict censorship from the church. This can, of course, be regarded as a major step forward concerning freedom of speech but also meant that inaccuracies, misunderstandings, and deliberate misinformation were mass printed and available to everyone who could read. One consequence of this was the loss of trust in institutions, and conflict between diverse groups of people, different religious beliefs, and different countries. Does this sound familiar? Well, some scholars have said that we currently live in a "post-Gutenberg" period. Until recently, most of our information came from newspapers, radio, and TV. The great majority of these institutions had a system with editorial control, and the ambition was to present truthful information. This has now changed; the internet and social media are open to everyone, and it is difficult for the average citizen to discriminate between deliberate misinformation, the opinion of an average layperson and the experience and knowledge of a professional.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SCIENTISTS IN THE CURRENT INFORMATION MAYHEM?

The objective of scientific research has always been to increase understanding, provide accurate information on a given topic and, in clinical science, new diagnostics and treatment options for patients. Science and scientists are currently under attack, ignored and often ridiculed. In this "post-Gutenberg" period of information flow, should scientists be active on social media? Yes, under certain conditions: choose the social media platform with care, stress that you are a professional and that you base your thoughts and recommendations on available scientific facts and always be honest.

A general and challenging aspect in all communication of scientific findings to the public is to explain the very nature of scientific research. Try to communicate the difference between established scientific

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facts and data from the forefront of science. As an example, it is well established that the world is a globe and that there are no green men on Mars; this contrasts with the uncertainties in understanding the intricacies of a black hole. Innovative science is always operating in the realm of uncertainties.

In our field, new facts will be coming out from studies of early embryo development which may totally change the way we currently see it. It is a constant battle between hypotheses and new data. This means that scientists quite often will change their minds. New information can mean that old dogmas fall; we must present this as a success, not a failure.

I remember when the first animal was cloned, Dolly the sheep. It took me some minutes to really grasp what this meant. We could reprogram a differentiated cell nucleus from a sheep udder, transfer the nucleus to a denucleated sheep oocyte and create a fully functional sheep. This truly opened Pandora's box concerning stem cells. When I realised that we were facing a new understanding and that my textbook in cell biology now was obsolete, I had shivers down my spine of joy; this was a scientific revolution, and I looked forward to what we now could find.

As a scientist, always be honest; do not overstate or hype. Try to describe your findings as accurately as possible. Overstating the implications of a finding often leads to a backlash. After the cloning of Dolly, some scientists claimed that humans will be cloned shortly and that human organs will soon be produced *in vitro*. This did not happen right away, and you could hear from the public: "Scientists talk, but do they achieve anything?" It took years before stem cell technology became mainstream in some clinical settings, and we should have been honest with the fact that it usually takes years between a revolutionary new understanding of biological processes and a radically new clinical application.

PUBLISH OR PERISH

Even the most honest scientist can make mistakes. We quite often see substandard study designs and substandard or even outright wrong analysis of data. If you are not familiar with these topics, seek advice before initiating a study and not at least when you do the analysis of the data obtained. In my previous job as Editor-in-Chief of Human Reproduction Update, a quite common reason for rejecting a proposal or a manuscript was that there were flaws in the study design or in the analysis of the data.

Even if everything is optimal—the topic, the study design, and the relevant and correct analysis of the data—a challenge remains: the findings must be published. It is truly a jungle out there; some "journals" are just fraudulent predatory journals that offer rapid publication "with an easy editorial process," this is for money, of course. Once you have paid the "journal," you might not see your manuscript again, and it is often not published at all. Most scientists' mailboxes are flooded with offers from predatory journals. Sending your manuscript to these journals is not only a waste of money but a loss for the authors involved the scientific community and the public in general.

Some journals try their best to be honest but have a substandard editorial policy, a flawed review process and issues with their publisher. There is a website that is called "Retraction Watch" (https://retractionwatch.com), which is useful to follow if you want to spot journals that have quality issues.

SUPPORT YOUR JOURNAL

Indian scientists will, of course, try to publish their best data in a high-ranking journal, that does not have (or had ☺) a dream about a "Nature paper." Most of us will have to do with more modest journals. In the mid-80s, the founding fathers of European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) had a clear ambition of creating their own journal. Pioneers like Bob Edwards and Jean Cohen expressed that they thought that European scientists were discriminated against by non-European journals, even though a lot of the pioneering work in In-vitro fertilisation (IVF) was done in Europe. Bob Edwards said repeatedly, "We must have our own journal(s)." In the beginning, Human Reproduction was a start-up; the journal was unknown, had no impact factor and was not listed in databases such as Web of Science. ESHRE members were encouraged to send good papers to Human Reproduction even though the journal still was relatively unknown and without an impact factor. Gradually, Human Reproduction was recognised as a good journal and became a success. Indian scientists have an opportunity to do something similar. Send good papers to Fertility Science and Research. If you look at the information from the authors, it is evident that the journal has an ambition of becoming a quality journal. The requirements for authors concerning ethical and quality issues are exemplary.

When relevant, cite good papers published in Fertility Science and Research when you submit papers to international journals. This is the only way to build your high-quality journal. I have a strong belief that this will benefit Indian scientists and India as such.

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