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Editorials

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Editorial: Calling a Halt to Further Proliferation of Journals

Linda Steiner

The double-negative notwithstanding, there is no aspect of editing *CSMC* that I will not miss when my term is over. Some aspects have been frustrating—from dealing with egregious plagiarism to prompting recalcitrant referees to complete their reviews. Yet, I found every responsibility gratifying and worth doing. I even came to regard with fondness the Manuscript Central, which initially seemed eccentric, if not perverse.

That said, having vigorously—perhaps some might say, viciously—edited manuscripts in order to preserve space for additional or longer manuscripts, I now claim a bit of this precious resource for commenting on an increasingly troubling trend: the continuing proliferation in the number of academic journals in media studies and communication. One international expert in library and information studies provides data indicating growth at a diminishing rate in the total numbers of academic journals across the disciplines (Meadows, 1993). Whether this tapering off is also true of our field is unclear, but it does not appear to be the case. Certainly, as in other fields, media or communication journals are very rarely killed off. The problem is that while knowledge is a public good, more is not necessarily better.

Some will compare this criticism to the "old" immigrant groups trying to block an influx of new immigrants. Founded in 1984, *CSMC* is arguably a newcomer, compared to the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, now publishing its 93rd volume. Nor is the problem unique to our field, or even to our time. A 1940s study found that U.S. research libraries were doubling in size every 16 years; others find evidence of almost literally exponential growth in academic journal titles since the 17th century, as well as expansion in the number of pages of existing titles (Meadows, 1993). Indeed, already in 1826 the chemist and physicist Michael Faraday complained that no scientist could possibly read all relevant books and papers:

> [T]heir number is immense, and the labour of winnowing out the few experimental and theoretical truths which in many of them are embarrassed by a very larger proportion of uninteresting matter, of imagination, and error, is such, that most persons who try the experiment are quickly induced to make a selection in their reading, and thus inadvertently, at times, pass by what is really good. (quoted in Meadows, 1993, p. 23)

The launches of scholarly journals in media and communication over the last three decades were surely legitimate, given growth in the field and increases in the number

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Notes

1. Consider the hidden costs to the scholarly community of each submission, given the time an editor spends processing a manuscript and identifying and contacting appropriate reviewers; and the time reviewers take to read and write a critique. The

more there are journals with overlapping missions, the more often authors will resubmit their rejected manuscripts. Thus, the more “we” incur this cost.

2. Whether university and commercial presses have significantly reduced their commitment to scholarly books (see Greco, Rodriguez & Wharton, 2007) remains unclear, but the claim is probably overstated. In any case, much attention has been paid to books; but of the little attention paid to serials, most of it concerns questions of electronic and open-access formats.

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