

The Webscout

Authors and Authorship

This issue of *Medical Writing* focuses on authors and authorship, but where, in fact, did the term “authorship” come from? The term first appeared in the early 18th century. In a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English and available online at <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED266481.pdf>, Lisa Ede describes the historical perspective and development of the concept of authorship. She explains that authorship is a complex construct and reflects the contemporary culture.

Apropos history: Did you know that it is a matter of debate that Shakespeare really is the author of the works accredited to him? According to the Shakespearean Authorship Trust (www.shakespeareanauthorshiptrust.org.uk), whether he is the true author of his works has been debated for hundreds of years.

According to a presentation entitled “A Visual History of Authorship” (<http://prezi.com/wd7yqxxkl-qw/visual-history-of-authorship/>), the history of authorship can be split into three cultures: the pre-print, the

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print and the digital culture. This fits perfectly with Lisa Ede’s explanation that common understanding of what authors and authorship mean changes as culture evolves. Of course, the meanings can differ between literary works and academia. Wikipedia defines the term “academic authorship” as the way “by which academics communicate the results of their scholarly work” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_authorship).

In 2011, Google created a special web feature named “authorship”, connecting each piece of content to an author profile with individual biographical information and photograph. The idea was to influence page rankings based on the reputation of its authors using digital signatures. Because of a lack of success and the sinking prominence of G+, Google cancelled the authorship

programme in autumn 2014. As explained in the blogs Web Engine Land (<http://searchengineland.com/authorship-dead-long-live-authorship-217209>) and Buzzsumo (<http://buzzsumo.com/blog/author-authority-influence-content-marketing-interview-j-d-metz/>), this initiative could have helped authors build their “author authority”, which aims to help authors generate credibility and awareness so that their content is read.

Modern communication allows not only spreading of your ideas but also interaction between you and your community, who can leave you comments and messages or add their own ideas. So what about the authorship of user-generated content on, for example, your webpage or blog? What looks like a simple issue turns out to be much more complex. Do you want to reuse content posted by your community? What do you have to consider in terms of liability? Who is responsible for the content? If you declare that you own all content posted on your page including those of your followers, than you might also be liable, for example, for copyright infringement. Some information and guidance can be found on the blog Legal to English (<http://outsourcedassociate.com/owns-user-generated-content-site/>).

Finally, what do social networks have to say? Instagram (www.instagram.com/explore/tags/authorship), for example, gives an idea of how people are visualising the term “authorship”. This can be a source of inspiration. Different pictures of reading, writing or books from daily life might encourage you to further explore and stumble over interesting people and interesting ideas.

Did you like this Webscout article? Do you have any questions or suggestions? Please feel free to get in touch and share your thoughts.

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