

# GENRE EVOLUTION IN RESEARCH COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH

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## ABSTRACT

Academic genres in research are exposed to, and also emerge from a constant evolution. The aim of this article is to identify potential problems when studying, analysing, and ultimately, describing and accepting new (knowledge dissemination) electronic genres in research communication. It reviews recent studies on evolving and digital genres and how/when they can be considered as newcomer-genres in research communication. Finally, ways to study, and hence, accept new electronic genres in research communication in English are proposed.

KEY WORDS: Evolving genres, electronic genres, knowledge dissemination.

## RESUMEN

Los géneros académicos de investigación están expuestos, y también emergen, de una evolución constante. El objetivo de este artículo es identificar los posibles problemas con los que nos encontramos a la hora de estudiar, describir y aceptar nuevos géneros electrónicos de divulgación del conocimiento. Este trabajo repasa los estudios recientes sobre la evolución de los géneros digitales y cómo y dónde pueden ser considerados como un género “recién llegado” a la comunicación de la investigación. Por último, se proponen también nuevos enfoques para estudiar y, por lo tanto, aceptar estos nuevos géneros electrónicos de divulgación del conocimiento.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Géneros en evolución, géneros electrónicos, divulgación del conocimiento.

## EVOLVING GENRES AND EVOLVING THEORIES

Genres in research communication are in constant evolution—unlike the canonical perception of academic genres. New rhetorical and lexico-grammatical features are gradually being introduced into these traditional academic genres (see for instance: Bazerman, *Shaping* or Berkenkotter and Huckin, *Genre*). Berkenkotter and Huckin adopted the paradigm of *dynamic evolving genres* as the main principle when describing their concept of genre (“Rethinking” 500). In their studies on genre, linguists do not overlook the fact that almost every written genre is evolving due to societal needs—or convenience. Kamberelis states that “neither old nor new com-



munity members never learn genres once and for all; rather, they must continually learn the generic ways of making meaning with texts that evolve within the ongoing socio-rhetorical activity of the communities” (150). Changes in our social contexts are motivating even changes in the conceptualising of the term *genre*.

One of the best examples of how social changes affect the emergence and evolution of genres is the increasing use of online communication and studies about electronic genres (see for instance Wise; Myers, *Discourse*; Luzón-Marco, “Bloggers”; Campagna et al. or Herrando-Rodrigo). Hallin studied how this rapid rise in the number of Internet users has also shaped electronic genres. For instance, news articles are short texts that are sometimes reduced to a headline in electronic publications. Thurman justifies the layout of electronic genres by stating that concretely, online newspapers engage readers for very short periods of time. Many studies (Bateman et al.; Knox, “Visual-verbal,” “Online”; Bateman) have been conducted on how social processes, in this case related to mass media, have affected the evolution of certain genres.

There are of course certain genres that are witnessing slight and slow changes. It is well known that genres such as the scientific research article (RA) genre has a priority as such, which is disseminating knowledge claims and is therefore intended to be accepted by the target audience of peers, that is the RA discourse community. Berkenkotter and Huckin in line with earlier studies such as Bazerman’s (*Shaping*) stated:

Genre features of the RA are therefore evolving in the direction of a more reader-based schema. However, this has been taking place gradually, as there is a notable opposing pressure to retain the traditional writer-based schema. The reason is that the primary role of the scientific RA, even more than conveying new knowledge claims, is the certification or validation of those claims. (*Genre* 40)

From Eggins’ early approach to genre: “[...] genre is a purposeful cultural event that is realised through schematic structure and realisational patterns” (36)—and subsequent works that stress the simultaneous clashing of discourse analysis, genre analysis and discourse communities’ roles when approaching genre analysis (Dudley-Evans)—its conceptualisation has become more flexible. Swales’ (*Genre*) seminal work on a new path of research into genre structure and genre evolution opened a Pandora’s box full of possibilities, realities and academic situations. A lot of research has been carried out during these years. However, the focus is now on the potentiality of this genre flexibility concept, which will later be related to the influence of emerging electronic genres.

Bhatia reflects on the concept of genre, questioning whether genre analysis somehow contributed to its taming in a fictional way to make it fit into teaching syllabuses for classroom environments:

Genre analysis can be viewed from two different perspectives: it may be seen as a reflection of the complex realities of the world of institutionalised communication, or it may be seen as a pedagogically effective and convenient tool for the design



of language teaching programmes, often situated within simulated contexts of classroom activities. (“Generic” 2)

Bhatia, like many other researchers, has highlighted that nowadays the issue of genre is not just crucial for linguists but it has also gained interest among members of other disciplines such as scientists, due to their increasing need to disseminate their research. However, there are certainly variations and conflicts between some academic genres among disciplines. Different perspectives, nomenclatures or even interpretations—sometimes contradictory—can be found among members of the same discipline, as Bhatia (“John”) states in agreement with researchers such as Candlin and Hyland.

Approaches to genre analysis should therefore be based on dynamic perspectives of real life situations, because nowadays texts are also varied in their communicative purposes. It is true that, although we mainly distinguish genres due to certain characteristics (Berkenkotter and Huckin, *Genre*), these genres are in constant evolution. Moreover, expert discourse community members may also make use of divergent patterns exploiting the genre conventions (Berkenkotter and Huckin, *Genre*; Bhatia, *Analysing, Worlds*)—some experts have launched different patterns based on these original patterns in order to disseminate their work in other types of publications. Bhatia agrees with this idea when stating that there are genres that are also used to transmit the particular intentions of the researcher (*Analysing*). In real life situations genres are focused on their usage context and therefore they may be seen as hybrid genres embedded in different categorisations. This constant and dynamic feature could be supported by Bhatia’s idea of genre versatility:

[a]lthough genre analysis is seen as applied in concern, and as such puts a heavy premium on conventional use of language, it is versatile and dynamic in nature, essentially explanatory rather than purely descriptive, narrow in focus, but broad on vision, and has a natural propensity for innovation and exploitation. (“Generic” 6)

It could be concluded that not every text is a pure instance of a particular genre. Chimombo and Rosebery stated that texts could also be combined in structure and discourse depending on their communicative purpose.

This innovative view of genre analysis could be directly applied to the emergence of new types of texts such as electronic popularizations or, as cited at the beginning of this section, to online news that have evolved due to certain social and professional demands. These types of texts appeared with the emergence of new technologies. Fortanet et al. described this situation in the following terms:

A drastic change was brought about in the mid-90s when, along with an enormous—almost uncontrolled—expansion of the network, the commercial possibilities in both economic exchange and advertising products have completely altered the initial concept of an academic Internet. This transformation has had a rippling effect in the way genres—originally designed for a different context and situation—are being reproduced on the net. (94)



In line with Bhatia (*Worlds*, “Genre,” “Interdiscursivity”), it will be argued here that genres are versatile and are constantly creating and developing new patterns. Genres cut across disciplinary boundaries and yet they show disciplinary variations. This so called genre hybridity is a result of the bending of conventions that triggers us to do something else. In other words, it is the result of genres mixing or crossbreeding. All the above, along with the external expectations from the potential audience, is the background from which new knowledge dissemination electronic genres dealing with the latest R&D, wellness or health issues findings have been conceived and therefore, have been crafted and launched.

## DIGITAL OR ELECTRONIC GENRES

The advent of new ways of communication and specifically of the Internet has allowed many genres to be disseminated among their discourse communities in a faster and more accessible way. In fact, the Internet has also influenced, and in some ways constrained, some genres’ conventional features. The purpose of this section is to reflect on how the Internet can shape knowledge dissemination electronic genres by reviewing previous studies on electronic genres, also called digital genres, usually drawn from previously existing written genres. This electronic or digital framework may have introduced drawbacks, constraints or advantages in specific genres. I aim to review some of the scenarios of what is known as digital or electronic media to later discuss whether these genres are shaped by this circumstance, that is, being disseminated on the Internet. Specific linguistic features resulting from the process of genre adaptation to the channel of publication have been studied by scholars such as Crystal, however, I do not focus on this issue but on previous studies on web-mediated texts such as: Yates and Orlikowski, “Genres”; Orlikowski and Yates; Shepherd and Watters; Crowston and Williams; Giltrow and Dieter; Berkenkotter or Luzón-Marco.

In line with Crowston and Williams, it will be argued here that several significant current discussions about electronic or digital genres are: i) whether these genres are new or emerging communication media, ii) whether these genres are embedded to form new patterns of communication, iii) whether these genres are being considered new genres because they are just composed of web-mediated texts and therefore can be approached from traditional genre theories although the Internet as a medium of communication has intrinsic and unique features or iv) whether we can define such a broad, international and varied readership or whether it is more realistic to describe just the presupposed role of these electronic genres’ discourse communities.

### 1) ARE ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL GENRES NEW OR EMERGING COMMUNICATION MEDIA?

Crowston and Williams state that from the point view of communication the World Wide Web is growing so quickly that new types of communication are subsequently being created. These scholars examine this phenomenon in order to observe



whether some old genres are adapted to take advantage of the linking and interactivity of this new communication medium or whether they are emerging communication genres. As the Internet has rapidly evolved thanks to this last decade of open access, the Web has become not only successful but also essential for our daily life. This means any type of user or Internet consumer can have access to the Internet and its endless possibilities. For instance, a wide range of different organisations and institutions have made the most of this varied and broad potential audience and have tried to reach diverse groups of Internet consumers by creating new communication genres (see for instance Miller, “Genre”). We must consider the Web as a social phenomenon that supports diverse communicative practices:

Communicative genre is defined generally as accepted types of communication sharing common form, content or purpose, such as an inquiry, letter, memo or meeting. Note that genre is not simply the medium of communication -a memo genre may be realized on paper or in an electronic mail message (two different media), while the electronic mail medium may be used to deliver memos and inquiries (two different genres). (Crowston and Williams 30)

Therefore, it can be seen that the medium in which different communicative practices take place does influence genres. Like these authors, one may wonder how the adoption of a new communication medium—in the case of the Internet—might be leading to the adaptation of existing genres and the emergence of new ones. It could be suggested that Internet users may socially categorise different communicative genres available on the Internet by their communicative action, their purpose and their form.

Some users may identify a genre by its form and other users by its linguistic features. However, Crowston and Williams argue that most genres imply a combination of purpose and form, such as a newsletter, which communicates the news of the day, including multiple short articles that are distributed periodically to subscribers or members of an organisation as seems to be the case, for instance, of medical electronic popularizations. New genres born from the wider use of the Internet as a means of communication, as is the case with e-mails, lead us to wonder if they are simply adaptations embedded in a different pattern of communication as the following section discusses.

## II) ARE ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL GENRES EMBEDDED TO FORM NEW PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION?

This section reflects on how genres can be embedded to form more complex patterns of communication. They can for instance be recognisable by a pattern comprising a genre system (Bazerman, “Systems”) or they can be a set of genres or a repertoire used within a community with different frequencies and for different communicative practices (Orlikowski and Yates). From a discourse community perspective, it should be considered that any genre may be hard to understand for someone outside a community. Freedman and Medway suggest that the capacity to



recognise a particular genre is one sign of membership of a particular community. Therefore, it could be concluded that incomprehensible genres may even be used deliberately to defend positions of privilege. As mentioned above, Orlikowski and Yates suggest that in a new situation individuals will draw on their existing genre repertoires, reproducing genres they have experienced as members of their community. According to Crowston and Williams, if these changes become repeatedly used, they may become accepted and used together with or instead of existing genres, extending or even altering the genre repertoire. However, it seems rather difficult to define the exact point at which a new genre emerges from an old one. As mentioned above, the key issues regarding the definition of genre rely on social acceptance, which may take years. Like Crowston and Williams, I consider that after a period of coexistence, the new combination of form and purpose may become generally recognised and named as a separate genre, as could be the case with medical research articles, printed medical popularizations and medical electronic popularizations. Genres may also be accepted in different communities at different rates. Therefore, the emergence of new genres could be one sign of the formation of a new community with new communicative practices. Yates Orlikowski, and Okamura suggested that these new genres are most likely derived from earlier genres that might have seemed appropriate to the situation. Crowston and Williams also conclude that the genres they found and classified on 100 web pages are reproduced in or adapted to the new media. They strongly recommend that web designers be aware of users' expectations of a genre. Most of the websites are public and easily available but their management is not centralised or rule-related. In other words, there is not an institution or shared framework that establishes a common basis to publish or communicate with their potential communities. As Orlikowski and Yates see it, the leader of every website is the website developer rather than the recipient of communication. Crowston and Williams add that as the audience is unpredictable, there is no clear separation of communities into different channels of communication as seems to be the case with knowledge dissemination electronic genres. However, the issue of genres on the Internet may seem understudied due to the rapid development of new genres of communication, the media and the experimentation of the potential genres.

### III) CAN ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL GENRES BE APPROACHED FROM TRADITIONAL GENRE THEORIES ALTHOUGH THE INTERNET AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION HAS INTRINSIC AND UNIQUE FEATURES?

Having observed the general idea of the Internet as a genre medium, this section traces its theoretical review back to Askehave and Nielsen and their specific approach to traditional genre theories applied to digital genres as non-linear multi-modal web-mediated documents. Taking as a point of departure Swalesian genre theory based on the relationship between discourse and social practices in academic settings, they try to validate the incorporation of media elements into the concept of *genre*, taking into account particular characteristics of the digital setting such as the browsing and reading elements of web mediated genres. Since the 80s



many insightful approaches to the definition of genre and genre studies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have been developed (cf. Swales, *Genre*; Martin; Bhatia, *Analysing*; Eggins; Miller, “Rhetorical”; Bazerman, “Systems”, etc.). All these studies were conducted in speech or print formats. In the last decade, the role of the Internet as web-mediated communication in our everyday life has aroused interest (Dickey; Myers, *Discourse*; Luzón-Marco, “Bloggers”, “Comments”, etc.). Like Askehave and Nielsen, this paper does not explore how or where these electronic genres are used, but seeks to validate these genres as research objects.

The concept of *medium* is intrinsic in the definition of digital genres. According to Askehave and Nielsen the Internet as a medium has several features which significantly influence and contribute to “the way the web-mediated genres look and are used” (121). Electronic genres could be conceptualised as goal-oriented (Swales 1990). The communicative purpose therefore constitutes the rationale for the genre. This fact, which encourages particular text structures, enhances the use of conventionalised lexico-grammatical and rhetorical strategies. Following Swales’ three-level genre model (*Genre*), Askehave and Nielsen study one single homepage, focusing on three constituents of a genre: the communicative purpose, the move structure and the rhetorical strategies. They conclude that the communicative purpose of the homepage under study could not be approached as a single text in isolation. They state that to analyse these digital genres we should use the context of the homepage and its discourse community. The move structure of digital genres is graphically arranged according to the communicative purposes of those genres. Generally speaking these genres leave room for rhetorical variation depending on the genre model. It could also be argued that establishing moves in a digital text could increase ambiguity. There is a certain degree of disagreement regarding which criteria should be used for identifying move structure (cf. Paltridge). Whereas Swales recommends focusing on lexis, grammar and rhetorical functions to establish moves (*Genre*), Eggins relies merely on lexis and grammar, Martin relies on the layout of a text—headings, subtitles, etc.—and Bhatia believes that “the ultimate criteria for assigning discourse values to various moves is functional rather than formal” (*Analysing* 87)

#### IV) WHAT IS THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES IN ELECTRONIC GENRES OR DIGITAL GENRES?

It is essential for the global understanding of the nature of knowledge dissemination electronic genres to reflect on the role of the potential readership as recipients and electronic information consumers. Therefore, it should be considered here that web-mediated genres, such as homepages, are documents which introduce the user to the general content of the site and also function “as the official gateway of a web site as it enables the reader to access and navigate the site by providing navigational tools or links that branch off into the web site as a whole” (Askehave and Nielsen 124). Content can be accessed from the main website or it can also be reached for instance by *secondary paths* such as “Googling” pieces of information that





readers wish to find out or read about. Homepages, as hosts of digital or electronic genres, could be compared to newspapers since they have front pages, promotional news, eye-catching headings, etc. Homepages, however, can go beyond traditional existing genres due to their multimodal properties. They have visual aids, sound, flash images etc. Homepages present a selection of topics which are governed by what the authors believe will satisfy the immediate information need of readers when they consult the web page. The primary communicative purpose of the homepage may seem to present a reading mode as a social practice. The choice of information, design and layout of the homepage is centred on the recipient, although the sender has a crucial image-creating role. This idea could be illustrated with the genre of medical electronic popularizations (Herrando-Rodrigo). Medical electronic popularizations are medical research articles combination of form and content, which aim to meet the readers' expectations on the net offering trustworthy medical information to a wide range of readers.

As a whole the homepage, as a navigating option, mainly provides access to the website content through different frames and different spaces or moves—greeting, identifying the sender, indicating content structure etc. A sequence of moves is created through which the reader could take his/her own path. According to Askehave and Nielsen, there is a vague tendency towards a preferred text organisation which is similar to that of newspaper front pages: the most important information first and the least important last.

There are further features that characterise web-mediated genres. For instance, it could be considered as McLuhan states, that the medium of digital genres is the message itself. This medium encourages the reader to self-navigate throughout the World Wide Web thanks to the presence of hypertexts or hyperlinks. They are presented as *clickable objects*—underlined words or icons that allow the reader and navigator to read further and to go from one website to another website. The functional value of links is concerned with the relationship established between the chunks of information being connected. These hyperlinks may present forced reading, due to so many potentially required reading stops. The flow of meaning is not interrupted by hyperlinks, on the contrary they enliven them. Some knowledge dissemination electronic genres, such as patients' self-care webs, exploit the multimedia potential generated by the WWW portrayed in music, video, animation etc. inviting the reader to participate actively in assigning meaning in the process of text consumption (Landow; Bolter). Knowledge dissemination electronic genres, as for instance medical electronic popularizations, present non-linear texts. Their sender-oriented texts include hypertexts that are electronically linked to some text items. This network of texts (Landow; Fritz; Bolter) is a non-sequential text system, which is recipient-oriented to facilitate explanations and further readings on potentially difficult aspects of the text contents.

From an analytical viewpoint, scholars such as Landow, Bolter or Askehave and Nielsen point out that there is no clear distinction between text production and text reception on the Internet. Above all, the most remarkable aspect is that readers can choose where to begin their reading and where to end it. They choose their own path and create their own hypertext system, becoming a kind of web-author.





Therefore, as mentioned above, one of the most remarkable features of web-mediated texts is the effect of hypertexts on web-users. Sosnoski argues that the existence of hypertexts linked to some chunks of information “places certain constraints on the reading pattern” which lead the reader to over-read (135). Hyper-reading also reduces any potential linearity regarding the traditional reading comprehension of a text. However, many readers have been taught how to filter, skim and scan texts in their academic education to improve their reading skills by disregarding the existence of hyperlinks and hypertexts. Finnemann states that the existence of non-linear texts is not due to the recent appearance of hypertexts and web-mediated texts:

In ordinary text you are supposed to move from chapter 1 to chapter 2 while in a hypertext you are supposed to choose your own serial order at various stages on the journey. But even so, you still have to choose, you have to determine the order in which you will read the text and this order will always have to be sequential. The optional freedom in hypertext systems is not a freedom from sequentialized linearity, since the user cannot make more than one choice at a time. (Hypertext and the representational capacities of the Binary alphabet, 25)

Finnemann highlights the fact that a hypertext is a text system which has the ability to activate at least two modal shifts in the reading process: the *reading-as-such mode* and the *navigating mode*. The first reading deals with the traditional reader position with sequential and guided reading, and the second process allows the reader to navigate the site and actively construct his/her own reading path through several windows or sites. Askehave and Nielsen state that when consuming web texts, the web user employs two different cognitive capacities and demonstrates two different types of behaviour when s/he shifts from the reading to the navigating mode and vice versa. The concept of *modal shift* in hypertext reading offers an interesting perspective on web genres and is a key distinction in the traditional genre analysis model. The analysis of web genres should be centred around the two models: “[w]hat we need then is an extension of the genre model to account for the fact that a web text also functions in the navigating mode where the text, due to its media constraints, becomes an interactive medium, used actively to navigate the web site” (Askehave and Nielsen 127). The genre model has been widely proven to be useful for describing the characteristics of one-dimensional genres. However, since hypertexts are essential in web-mediated genres, the image of a two-dimensional genre model is inherently necessary. Askehave and Nielsen’s solution is to “reconsider the genre model; keep the basic premises of the model (the three-level analysis of the communication purpose, move structure and rhetorical strategies), but add the hypertextual mode (Finnemann’s concept of navigating mode) to all levels of analysis, thus producing a two-dimensional genre model” (127). Figure 1 visually represents this two-dimensional genre model:



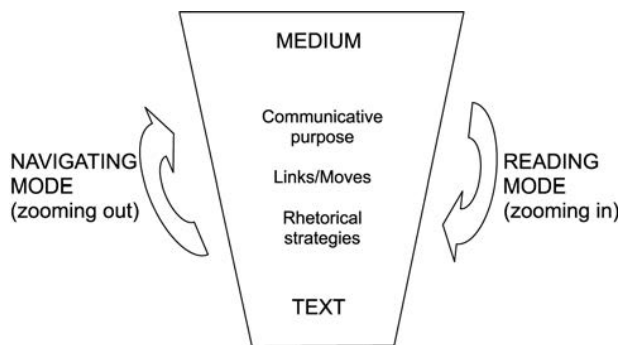


Figure 1. Askehave and Nielsen's model (127).

This model then visually represents that: i) Users of web documents carry out modal shifts—shifts between acting as a reader and acting as a navigator; ii) Shifts are circular—there is a constant change between reading and navigating; iii) When in the reading mode, the reader zooms in on the text and uses the web document as if it was a printed text (basically reads the texts); iv) When in the navigating mode, the navigator zooms out of the text and uses the web document as a medium (exploiting its navigation possibilities); v) An account of the generic properties of genres on the web involves a three-level analysis of both modes:

- a) In the reading mode, the text must be characterised in terms of its communicative purpose, moves, links and rhetorical strategies.
- b) In the navigating mode, the medium must be characterised in terms of its communicative purpose, links and rhetorical strategies. This two-dimensional model considers the functional properties of the text and the medium from the point of view of the text producer. Bhatia (*Analysing*) and Swales' (*Genre*) genre analysis model was based on a sender-oriented view and on the communicative and functional purposes of the genre. The roles of the recipient may seem to be unexplored. However, the study of the roles of the recipients opens a broad and complex research field.

As shown throughout this section, the interplay between medium and genre is a key feature of the web-mediated genre as is also the purpose, which may also influence the form as discussed above. Although Yates, Orlikowski, and Okamura claim that “[i]t is the genres enacted within a medium that establish the communicative purpose of the interaction, not the medium” (100), they later recognise that the medium may play a role in both the recurring situation and the form of a genre. They also admit that when studying web-mediated genres, the researcher is faced with genres which are more than “traditional genres transferred to the net”; in fact web-mediated genres may be substantially different from printed genres because the web genre often exploits the characteristics of the hypertext medium.



One of the strongest arguments Askehave and Nielsen put forward to state that the medium forms an integral part of the genre and therefore should be included in a genre analysis model of web-mediated genres is that hypertexts become severely “handicapped” when printed out onto paper and removed from their medium. As a result, web genres cannot be characterised as genres in isolation from their medium. Although the distinction between *genre* and *medium* may seem to be clear, the boundaries between these two concepts still remain invisible.

## TOWARDS A GENRE MODEL ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION ELECTRONIC GENRES IN RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

As regards genre relations, knowledge dissemination electronic genres and their corresponding former academic genres, that is the genres they usually draw upon—as is for instance the case in medical research articles and their ensuing electronic popularizations—show different conditions of production and consumption and therefore the communicative purpose of both genres, their writers and readers do necessarily differ. Nonetheless, the consultation of sources regarding genre relations (Devitt; Bazerman, “Systems”; Orlikowski and Yates; Crowston and Williams; Tardy; Swales, *Research*; Bhatia, *Worlds*; Berkenkotter; Campagna et al.; Gotti) led me to observe that these newly-born genres should be understood as adaptations or reformulations of former field-specific genres that disseminate scientific knowledge to mainly non-specialised audiences so as to respond these readers’ urge to know, that is, a reliable answer to social need.

Knowledge dissemination electronic genres are popular dissemination texts commonly written by “entrepreneurs of science” (as Myers, “Social,” and Adams-Smith pointed out) that linguistically mediate between academic and technical genres and the lay audience or recipients. In addition, these knowledge dissemination electronic genres writers seek neutrality and objectivity using an information structure that meets the Internet consumers’ expectations in a journalistic format.

Although the interaction between researchers/writers with readers is one-way, these electronic genres, which disseminate scientific findings outside the scientific community, are socially constrained. In other words, knowledge dissemination electronic genres are socially constructed but not affected by the social interaction of its discourse community members, since there is no interaction between all the members of the discourse community. The nature of these genres, and thus, the communicative purpose of these electronic dissemination texts (disseminate trustworthy and accessible scientific information outside the scientific community) shape the form and content of these emerging genres, which are lately raising awareness in research communication in the field of applied linguistics.

This review article raises concern about the validity of traditional genre models for the analysis, study and definition of these newly born genres. Turning to Crowston and Williams, Yates and Orlikowski (“Genre”), Askehave and Nielsen, Giltrow and Stein for the exploration of electronic genres should cast light upon



any future study of this nature. Inspired by Swales (*Genre*), these studies base their methodology on the observation of three factors: the communicative purpose, the moves and rhetorical strategies. However, there are some aspects that, to my knowledge, should also be taken into consideration since they govern the manufacturing process of knowledge dissemination electronic genres as final products. These two key elements are: 1) the Internet as channel of information dissemination and 2) the potential “unstable” audience or readership, directly affect, and thus, craft these knowledge dissemination electronic genres. Therefore, a multimodal approach to the analysis of these genres should be carried out together with a reflection on the amalgam of potential electronic information consumers, who surf the net in search of trustworthy and reliable information all over the world—and who may be educated readers that are able to discern the form and content of these pieces of field-specific information. In such a way, an appropriate and accurate conceptualisation of these emerging genres in research communication in English could be obtained.

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