



How the Internet kills curiosity

Description

[NASA](#) successfully landed its latest robotic vehicle on Mars 6 August, 2012, which is also the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. I found that fact while browsing the Internet on the theme of *curiosity*. The coincidence works best if you go with Greenwich Mean Time rather than Pacific Daylight Time – another Internet-discovered factlet.

The new Mars rover is of course called *Curiosity*, a name that departs from the usual lexicon of pioneers, conquerors and the bold (Voyager, Discovery, Apollo, Viking). The *bomb* is of course associated with Pandora’s box (‘We’ve opened Pandora’s box and the genie can’t be stuffed back in the bottle’ according to a [Los Alamos scientist](#)). So it all kind of fits. Curiosity can be risky, if not lethal.



The text of [Hesiod: Works And Days](#) (written around 700BC) tells the story of Pandora’s box, and is freely available on the web (the text that is). Pandora was a kind of female archetype. Hephaestus, Athene and Aphrodite gave her form, arts and graces, but the god Hermes put in her ‘a shameless mind and a deceitful nature.’ No wonder her curiosity got the better of her and she opened the tempting box (or jar) gifted to her, and unleashed all those plagues and evils (leaving hope behind).

As was the Devil to Eve, it’s actually Hermes the false guide and trickster god who was the culprit for purveying ‘lies and crafty words.’ The closest NASA has come to naming one of its missions after Hermes is Mercury, the Roman copy ‘rehabilitated as the swift messenger.’

Apart from discovering all these facts on the Internet hereâ??s what else Iâ??m curious about.

1. You can look up facts on your smartphone from anywhere and at any time. We also know the information is there, even if we donâ??t look it up. Conversation thrives on speculation about facts, showing off knowledge, and sharing information: Olympic medal scores, the name of that actor in *Total Recall*, how long it takes to get to Mars, how to cook artichokes. Thereâ??s no need to speculate, and no need even to look it up. Will the Internet eventually dull our curiosity, a claim already made about the habits of generation Y?
2. There is more than one Internet. Google Scholar is pretty good, but if you are lucky enough to be in a University with generous access to online journal subscriptions then you can search, browse and cite learned articles on just about anything. I was recently researching ageing and wellbeing, uncovering sources in sports medicine, linguistics, psychology, education, design and anthropology. Will this newly available intellectual promiscuity uncover hitherto unnoticed connections, clashes and syntheses, or engender a kind of superficiality, the spread of â??lies and crafty wordsâ???
3. Does anyone list â??smart searchâ?? under *skill set* in their CV? Thereâ??s no point in looking up â??Pandoraâ?? on Google, as itâ??s a popular company name, and the name of the planet (moon) in a popular film. So there really is a skill in finding the right search terms, and linking them together. It also requires a fair degree of cultural knowledge. It seems to me that a couple of hours browsing on the Internet is now mandatory before writing or speaking on a topic, not least to find out what has not been said already. This tactic may also sow [confusion](#), which needs to be managed.

Notes

- Hereâ??s a handy quote from a journal article on positive emotions: â??This converging evidence suggests that resilient people have optimistic, zestful and energetic approaches to life, are curious and open to new experiences, and are characterized by high positive emotionality.â??
Fredrickson, Barbara L. 2004. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, (359) 1449, 1367-1377, page 1372.
- On curiosity also see [After affects](#), [Why ask?](#)
- On the trickster function see [LOL Security reproduces the trickster function](#), and [Unearthing the trickster function in Icelandic myth](#)
- See external post [Has the Internet killed curiosity?](#)
- According to the NASA website, the US Army had a test rocket called Hermes in the 1950s.
- See interesting [article and images](#) by Bob Stein working for Atari and predicting the use of mobile devices as knowledge sources in 1982, though missing the co-creative aspects of shared encyclopaedic knowledge.



Category

1. Culture

Tags

1. curiosity
2. Hermes
3. Hesiod
4. Hiroshima
5. Mars
6. NASA
7. Pandora
8. trickster

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Author

rcoyne99

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