

Healthcare industry BW

Science bloggers find their niche

The first Web log was initiated in 1991. Since then, an ever increasing number of scientists have been using these Internet diaries to communicate knowledge, report about science, comment on it and classify it. Web logs are an enrichment for science communication.

Their names are unusual and their messages come from real scientific life. People looking for "Einsteins Kosmos", "Skeptic as hell" or "Zwerge auf den Schultern von Riesen" are quickly part of the world of scientific blogs. The term blog is a contraction of Web log and is simply an online diary.

In scientific blogs, scientists, journalists and other people interested in communicating their thoughts and ideas report from and about science. The bloggers, as the writers of such diaries are called, report, evaluate, take positions, express their opinions, discuss and are occasionally very critical. Scientific blogs are completely new tools in scientific communication.

Facts but often in a tongue-in-cheek way

In such blogs, the messages are usually based on sound science but are not always too serious. On 4 June 2008, "The angry lab rat" commented on the very first sequencing of the full genome of a woman: "Now that they have sequenced the X chromosomes of a female, the researchers say they are better able to study X chromosome variability. That's well and good. But what I'd really like to know is which genes control that desire and ability of women to schedule everything. Or to coordinate their blouse with teal pumps. Or how to have a conversation on their tiny cell phone while simultaneously wiping a child's runny nose, stopping another child from climbing the bookcase, and writing up a report for their high-pressure career?"

Comprehensible, manifold, interlinked

Despite this rather moody contemplation of science, science blogs are also a rich source for those interested in the more serious aspects of science, research and technology. Blogs are current, written by experts and often written in a way to enable laypeople to understand them. In other words, first-hand science, about art history, sociology, physics, or the life sciences. In addition, the bloggers interlink their contributions. Modern Internet technology makes it possible for readers to find and read texts of different blogs that deal with the same topic. And those who want to stay up to date, can easily subscribe to news via news feeds.



Science blogs cover a broad range of scientific topics (Photo: BIOPRO)

Perhaps these features are the reason for the current success of science blogs in Germany. "In Germany, science blogs register growing hit rates, while fewer people access other blogs," said Beatrice Lugger, editor in charge of scienceblogs.de.

Science and more

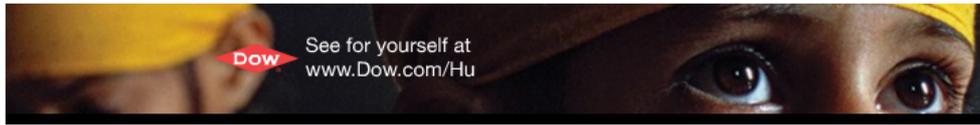
Science blogs do not only deal with scientific results. Blogs see research in relation to society as a whole and discuss (self)critically the functions of science and technology. Bloggers even discuss the role of blogs in science communication. In her "Neuropädagogik" blog, the pedagogue Monika Armand raised questions concerning the quality of science blogs. The topic is actively discussed. The blogger community frequently discusses its own relevance, in an academic manner though. However, this enables the blogger community to further develop its function as well as its goals.

Uncontrolled growth

The number of Web logs in the World Wide Web can only be estimated roughly. As of July 2008, Technorati, an Internet search engine for searching blogs, indexes nearly 113 million blogs worldwide. However, the figure is deceptive as it does not provide any information on how many blogs are actually active. In addition, the figure only considers blogs that Technorati has been able to index. According to Christoph Neuberger, communication scientist at the University of Münster, in November 2007, there were about 130,000 blogs that were regularly (every eight weeks) updated. Beatrice Lugger believes that about 2,000 of the 130,000 blogs deal with scientific topics. Therefore, science blogs occupy a niche, one that is becoming increasingly important for people who want to publish and are excited about scientific topics.

Structural help through blog portals

The world of science blogs is unstructured. Recently, the first blog portals have been established that bring together the most relevant science blogs. ScienceBlogs.com is the American model that has been online since 2006. The portal was initiated and is operated by the Seed Media Group in New York. At the beginning it was unclear whether the concept was sustainable. "We had little idea what would happen when we started ScienceBlogs," said Katherine Sharpe from ScienceBlogs.com, adding "which is why we like to refer to it as an "experiment". We simply wondered what would happen if we were to place a dozen of the best blogs about science 'together,' on a single platform." Today, two years later, the experiment has to be regarded as a full success. About 100 posts are published daily in the 71 blogs of the portal, and the portal registers nearly six million pageviews per month.



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- Seed's Daily Zeitgeist: 7/29/2008
- Seed's Daily Zeitgeist: 7/28/2008
- Seed's Daily Zeitgeist: 7/25/2008
- Seed's Daily Zeitgeist: 7/24/2008



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Science in the Academy
THE BUZZ IN THE BLOGOSPHERE

On Saturday, Chad Orzel argued that academics are assumed to be well versed in the arts and humanities, but not necessarily in math or science. Janet Stemwedel offered a possible explanation: teachers at all levels tend to reinforce the idea that math and science are inherently difficult, "which tends not to inspire much devotion to the subject matter."

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The Scienceblogs.com blog portal started in 2006 and brings together 71 blogs. (Photo: scienceblogs.com)

The ScienceBlogs.com initiators were faced with several challenges when they established the portal. They had to develop a format that enabled readers and users to conceive the different blogs as part of a whole and not as a collection. On the other hand, some bloggers really had to be convinced about the benefit of the portal. Many of the bloggers liked the independence and were quite reluctant to enter the unknown territory of a blog platform.

German media companies are discovering science blogs

In the meantime, the German blogger community is becoming increasingly interlinked. The Wissenschaftscafé (science café), run by Marc Scheloske from Munich, social scientist and one of the most active science bloggers in Germany, unites posts from a broad range of different disciplines at wissenschafts-cafe.net. The blogs remain independent and do not become part of the platform. The science café just brings together the latest posts of the blogs that participate in the portal.

Even two well-known German media companies have discovered science blogs for themselves and have launched blog portals. Scilogs.de was launched in autumn 2007, a project of the Spektrum publishing house in Heidelberg, which is part of the Georg von Holtzbrinck group of publishing companies. Selected scientists and science journalists publish their views in 55 blogs organised into the categories: WISSENSlogs, BRAINlogs, KOSMOlogs and CHRONOlogs.

The German part of scienceblogs.com is also only a few months old. The Burda publishing house joined scienceblogs.com and

initiated the German scienceblogs.de, which went online in February 2008 with 21 blogs. After nearly six months, the portal has grown to 29 blogs. "The portal is well accepted by the readers," said Beatrice Luggner. As the scienceblogs.de initiators had a mediapartnership with Focus online right from the start, the degree of popularity grew rapidly. The three most current blog posts are listed as "surf tip" on the focus.de science page. Luggner: "This helped us gain users that had previously not read blogs." In the meantime, scienceblogs.de cooperates with Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Scinexx online science magazine.

Powerful counterpublic



Getting informative and critical information from the PC into the WWW: blogs are regarded as counterpublic. (Photo: BIOPRO/Bächtle)

Science communication benefits from many dedicated bloggers on the Internet. Bloggers are independent, do not have to comply with editorial constraints, select their topics and the form of presentation themselves. This turns them into what media researchers call "counterpublic". Blogs are information instruments that uncover and present correlations with journalistic tools and with a high quality. A current example of this is the case of Hademar Bankhofer, a health expert from Austria. According to information provided by the boocompany.com blog portal on 21 July, Hademar was accused of having plugged certain drugs on different television stations, including the German ARD. The issue was taken up by the bloggers hockeystick and strappato. Those interested in the further development of the affair, will find further information in the "Stationäre Aufnahme" blog; a summary is provided at "placeboalarm".

No competition with journalistic formats

Blogs are appropriate tools for exciting events to find their way from the sciences into the public. Over the last years, scientific topics have become increasingly popular in classical media, however they cannot be dealt with in all their breadth by journals, magazines and radio/TV. That is why blogs are not regarded as competitors to classical media, but rather as complementary. Richard Zinken, editor in charge of spektrum direkt (Spektrum publishing house) said at the end of November 2007 at the "Wissenswert" conference: "Scilogs.de is a communication platform for topics that would otherwise not be dealt with in print journals." And Marc Scheloske explains in his wissenswerkstatt.net blog: "In ten years' time we will look back at today and laugh at the fact that blogs and conventional editorial journalism were regarded as opposites and competitors."

The fact that science blogs are only now starting to enjoy increasing popularity is quite astonishing. Back in 1991, a scientist at the CERN in Geneva used to regularly post his scientific progress on the Web. The person involved is hardly an unknown person: It was Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the Internet.

Article

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chb

[ScienceBlogs.de](#)

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