

SCIWORTHY: A SCIENCE NEWS SITE FOR ADDRESSING POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND DEFICITS IN ASTROBIOLOGY LITERACY IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC. Gina Riggio. Blue Marble Space, (griggio@sciworthy.com)

Introduction. SciWorthy (www.sciworthy.com) is an astrobiology and general science news site where each article covers a recently published paper and is written by the scientist themselves or a competent science writer. It has the potential to solve an important problem in science journalism -- accuracy. Representing a complex scientific idea with the full complement of background knowledge required to put it into proper context is difficult among experts, and summarizing it for a general audience is even more so.

While accuracy is a challenge for science journalism, accessibility and tone are challenges for scientists. Many science publications directed toward the general public have a left-leaning audience and theme. Blogs such as IFL Science, Popular Science, New Scientist, and Live Science are examples of websites that deliver content using “clickbait” advertising strategies like sensational headlines, politicized topics, and provocative claims in an attempt to reach atypical audiences and increase engagement. These websites can be enjoyable for the science informed citizen, but irritating and invalidating for people who have never been exposed to intellectual culture. Unfortunately, these websites have a significant social media presence that we suspect may do more harm than good. Using techniques that exploit emotions may lead readers to incorrectly assume that science is a belief system, a political position, a special interest, or ultimately condescending rather than the foundation upon which our modern society is built.

Mainstays such as National Geographic, Nature, Science Magazine, and Scientific American make a more concerted effort to rise above such tactics, but often the writing can be too dense for readers whose education does not go beyond high school or some college. Even college graduates and non-experts who have not been exposed to the concepts discussed in the article may struggle to find the motivation to read or connect with the articles. Educators may have difficulty locating articles for their students that have minimal partisan bent, are written with an engaging tone, and are still factually accurate.

Goal 1: Editorial Guidelines that Foster a Tone of Inclusivity. SciWorthy has the potential to address some of these unmet needs. The uncertainty of science is something many people struggle with and it is important to express this uncertainty in a way that does not confuse the reader. Confusion may lead to mistrust. Science writing that is engaging, clear, apolitical and

still able to capture the complexity of scientific questions is quite rare. Sciworthy tends toward an inclusive tone, as though the reader is part of the conversation rather than a student. Additionally, we eschew tactics common to advertisers that are now being suggested to science communicators.

Goal 2: Increasing Topics Relevant to Rural Communities. The second goal of Sciworthy is increasing representation of topics that would be relevant to rural communities and non-scientists. This is not to say that discussing provocative philosophical topics like origin of life or politicized issues like climate change should be forbidden. However, in order for factual information about climate change risks to be considered trustworthy, or the value of studying origin of life to be understood, it is necessary to first help the target audience feel like science is “for them.” Sciworthy plans to emphasize advances in agriculture, food science, sustainability, interesting technology, public health issues, and an emphasis on weather over climate.

Goal 3: A Supplemental Print Version of SciWorthy. The third goal of the SciWorthy revamp is to create a supplemental print version of the publication to distribute to communities that lack reliable internet access or would not otherwise be exposed to this content due to an increased emphasis on targeted advertising.

References: [1] Eide E, Hahn O. Good Practices in Climate Science Journalism. In: Kunelius R, Eide E, Tegelberg M, Yagodin D, eds. Media and Global Climate Knowledge: Journalism and the IPCC. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US; 2017:235-256. [2] Berger & Milkman. GfK Marketing Intelligence Review. Volume 5, Issue 1, Pages 18–23, ISSN (Online) 1865-5866