

Hi everyone,

one of the (many) motivating aspects of producing and distributing science videos surely is: to counterbalance the hair-raising stuff YouTube presents to its users with properly sourced, high-quality content. Our first news, therefore, are about fake news.

Then we expand our view to some developments in the field of streaming platforms and increasingly »sciencey« TV formats. Since they help to »shape the public's idea of how science is done and by whom«, as Kerstin Hoppenhaus writes, they give valuable hints to science communicators wondering about how to best address their audiences.

Thilo Körkel, Kerstin Hoppenhaus and Sibylle Grunze

## What's going on

### **Fake news 1: Copernicus was wrong**

Sometimes a researcher has to make sacrifices. For her [Alternative Beliefs Project](#) Asheley Landrum, assistant professor of science communication at Texas Tech University, attended the world's largest gathering of Flat Earthers. On February 17, she presented her results at a symposium at the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The telling title of her talk: »YouTube as the Primary Propagator of Flat Earth Philosophy«.

The Guardian [reported](#) on her study: Of 30 interviewed attendees, »all but one said they had not considered the Earth to be flat two years ago but changed their minds after watching videos promoting conspiracy theories on YouTube«. The one who didn't become convinced by watching YouTube videos became convinced by his daughter instead (who *did* watch YouTube videos on the topic). (tk)

### **Fake news 2: Self-regulation of internet monopolists does work**

Is there still no remedy against fake science news? In January, YouTube announced efforts »to make conspiracy videos harder to find«, as The New York Times [reports](#). The platform will stop recommending certain videos under certain circumstances, but it will not take them down or hide them in search results.

German science journalist Christoph Drösser, however, seems to be more inclined to prefer external regulation to self-regulation. On March 11 he [reports](#) that he had checked the Google search engine against the YouTube search engine, entering some science-related search terms in each. Google delivered reasonable results, while on YouTube he »got caught in a veritable maelstrom of conspiracy theories, esotericism and shallow tips for everyday life«.

Drösser ends his article citing Guillaume Chaslot, a former YouTube software

engineer: »... if you pass legislation that says that after recommending something 1,000 times, the platform is liable for this content, I guarantee the problem will be solved very fast.« (tk)

## Streaming science

Did you ever check out [labocine.com](http://labocine.com) or [curiositystream.com](http://curiositystream.com)? In the not so far future the natural habitat of popular science web videos may no longer be YouTube, but specialized streaming platforms like these two.

Labocine, launched in 2016, emerged from »Imagine Science Films«, a film festival in New York. Its makers »are committed to provoking scientific intrigue and understanding, always ensuring compelling and well-founded narratives«.

US-based CuriosityStream, which a few weeks ago [succeeded in raising 140 million USD](#) to expand its business, launched one year earlier and offers documentaries in the fields of science, technology, civilization, and human spirit. This rather wide focus even includes films about business, wellness, art and literature. CuriosityStream installed an impressive advisory board which includes Michio Kaku, Vint Cerf, Glenn Close, Wynton Marsalis, Jill Tarter, and others. It partnered with Amazon Prime almost from the start.

Both services, Labocine and CuriosityStream, come at the same subscription price of 3 USD per month. And both offer, in addition to feature-length films, beautiful short films or intense portraits focusing on specific scientific disciplines or personalities from the respective fields.

Is that it already? While we won't risk any predictions one thing is sure: Monetizing YouTube videos is not an option for professional filmmakers – they need financing for their films, so they will go to where the money is. And that's where you will find really good science videos in the future. (tk)

Read more:

nature.com: [Put it on camera: How to get into scientific film- and video-making](#), 3 January 2018

## Finally: The fictional world is becoming more »sciencey«

Science and scientists are still woefully underrepresented in fictional television programming in Germany, despite a strong international trend towards more science and a more differentiated depiction of scientists in movies and television programs. But with the spread of streaming services and pay TV, and the success of series like »Breaking Bad« and sitcoms like »The Big Bang Theory« or »Silicon Valley«, this is beginning to change. This development is not only relevant for film producers and TV programmers, but for science communicators as well, because these programs help shape the public's idea of how science is done and by whom.

Last fall, the Foundation for MINT-Entertainment-Education-Excellence (MINTEEE), supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Max Planck Society, Fraunhofer Society and others, published a brochure that summarizes the results of the conference »Science meets Fiction« held in Berlin in 2016. (MINT is the German language equivalent of the abbreviation STEM for the academic disciplines science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.)

The report gives some numbers on the state of science in fictional formats in the five biggest national TV programs in Germany: the public broadcasters ARD and ZDF as well as the private channels RTL, Sat1, and ProSieben. While ARD and ZDF have

the largest share of original productions, they also have the narrowest range of genres, with a heavy dominance on crime shows. Surprisingly, the private channel ProSieben offers the most diverse genre mix and is the only one of the five to show science-fiction (and mystery) series.

In its second part, the report explores the developments in science fiction movies produced for cinema, where traditionally there has been quite some collaboration between scientists and filmmakers. Part three of the report deals with the changing image of the »nerd«, who has not only moved from »strange outsider« to »cool and funny«, but also has become more diverse, and occasionally even female. There are now »hipster nerds« like Cosima from the »Orphan Black« TV series, and also what one author calls »suave nerds« like the new Sherlock Homes as played by Benedict Cumberbatch.

The most interesting part for me was the fourth, where the authors describe an international »Golden Age for Science in Entertainment«, and shed light on some of the reasons behind the slow and somewhat reluctant shift in German fictional programming towards science-related content. From interviews with media creators and programmers it becomes clear that there is indeed interest in »sciencey« content, not only because there seems to be a demand by the audience, but also because science helps to add realism to the storytelling, something that audiences increasingly seem to be valuing.

At the same time, according to the authors, especially the public broadcasters are facing a dilemma. They produce the lion's share of original programming in Germany. If they follow the tastes of their older audiences – crime series, ideally with local flair, as well as family series, and romance – they can achieve good ratings, but are less attractive for the younger generation, and also less successful on the international markets. Meanwhile, the younger audiences move to private channels and especially towards streaming services, where they find a much wider spectrum of high-quality series, more flexibility, and a much more diverse cast of MINT and female role models.

Despite all this, there are positive developments, too, like the success of the medical history drama series »Charité« at ARD or »Die Spezialisten« at ZDF about a forensics unit.

At this point, the [full report](#) is only available in German, but the MINTEEE-team has made some [articles available in English](#). (kh)

## Upcoming events

[»CPH:SCIENCE«](#), Copenhagen, Denmark, 25 March 2019. A day dedicated to science and cinema, and to the creative exchange between the two, in the context of the documentary film festival CPH:DOX.

[»Academia film Olomouc«](#), Olomouc, Czech Republic, 23-28 April 2019. This international festival for science documentary, having been founded in 1966, attracts more than 7.000 visitors. [Interview with the Head of AFO Production, Nikola Dašková](#) (25 February 2019)

[»Silbersalz«](#), Halle an der Saale, Germany, 20-23 June 2019. As a combination of festival and conference, which also includes film screenings, Silbersalz aims at making science »accessible in a clear and vivid fashion while simultaneously serving as a platform for the exchange of ideas and mutual inspiration«.

[»Artificial Intelligence Science Film Festival«](#), Karlsruhe, Germany, 3-5 July 2019. The festival is a part of the Science Year 2019, an initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and carried out by the ZAK | Centre for Cultural and

Videos only look good if you watch them

## How to shoot action which already has happened



### »Drifting in the Gulf«

By Guillaume Novelli, Laura Bracken Chaibongsai and Patrick Rynne

This clip is a good example of how you can still make a video when a lot of the action has already taken place, and tell the progress of research in retrospect. What makes the video really enticing: It shows the process of collecting data, including the failures, and not just the pure result of data collected. The woman narrator is fun to listen to, and her doing the voice over for her male colleagues adds an additional fun twist to the whole film. (sg)

## You are recruiting? Add some charm



### »Universität Innsbruck: Gemeinsam sind wir Uni«

By Martin Venier

This video is so charming that by the time you realize that the University of Innsbruck is recruiting you, you will already be halfway through it. Its strong concept is carried out well adding a touch of story to it and showing very diverse fields of work and a welcoming campus in a fun way. Its visual style is engaging and welcoming, and the voice over gives a good beat and adds smiles. (sg)

»**Science & Video**« is a newsletter for science communicators. In »Science & Video« [Thilo Körkel](#) (tk), [Kerstin Hoppenhaus](#) (kh) und [Sibylle Grunze](#) (sg) pool their long-standing expertise in the field of science communication and moving images. We joyfully welcome the effects of digital disruption, are committed to defending high quality standards, and hope to be part of a future in which science communication via digital media has an increasingly powerful impact on society. Contact us at [thilo.koerkel@nature.com](mailto:thilo.koerkel@nature.com), [hoppenhaus@hgmedien.com](mailto:hoppenhaus@hgmedien.com), [grunze@hgmedien.com](mailto:grunze@hgmedien.com).

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