

# The "Dark Side" of social conversations around science

## Contemporary Challenges and Potential Solutions for Science Communication

Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation (CERI)  
School for data and computational science  
Stellenbosch University (Main Campus), South Africa

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**Opening Session:**

*Welcome by Organisers and Sponsors*

**09:00 – 09:30**

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**Session 1 Presentations (8 mins):**

**09:30 – 10:30**

**Backlash Against Science: Anti-science Movements, Incivility and Harassment, Political Interference**

**Chair: Nils Bienzeisler** (*Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education, Germany*)

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**1. When Science Becomes Contingent: Political Volatility, Indigenous Research, and the Fragility of Climate–Health Communication – A Case Study.** John Paul Cauchi (*Queen Mary University of London, Malta Campus*)

**2. Platforms and Postcolonial Science Communication: A Case-Study from the Dutch Humanities.** Reinier Vriend & Donya Alinejad (*Utrecht University, The Netherlands*)

**3. When Transparency Backfires: Public Engagement and the Risks of Scientific Visibility.** Kim Darley Waddilove (*SANTHE, South Africa*)

**4. Condoning, Intervening, Ignoring: Citizen Responses to Attacks Against Scientists Online.** Jakob-Moritz Eberl (*University of Vienna, Austria*) & Jana Laura Egelhofer (*LMU Munich, Germany*)

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**COFFEE BREAK:**

**10:30 – 10:45**

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Session 2 Presentations (8 mins):

10:45 – 12:00

**Who Gets to Communicate?** Evolving Actors in Social Conversations Around Science

**Chair: Janine N. Blessing** (*University of Zürich, Switzerland*)

**1. Shining Light on 'Dark Science': Mapping the Field of Watchdog Science Journalism.** Aljoshia Karim Schapals (*Queensland University of Technology, Australia*), Michelle Riedlinger (*Queensland University of Technology, Australia*), Silvia Montaña-Niño (*University of Melbourne, Australia*) & Artem Rednikin (*Queensland University of Technology, Australia*)

**2. Curating Invisible Conversations: Science Communication, Data Stewardship, and the Politics of Care in Postcolonial Knowledge Systems.** Sibulele Mabe (*University of the Western Cape, South Africa*)

**3. Constructing Boundaries of Climate Scientists' Roles in Society: Focus Group Discussions with the Public about Desirable and Undesirable Climate Science Communication.** Christel van Eck (*University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands*) & Floriane van Alphen (*University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands*)

**4. Misguided Scientists? Potential Shortcomings in Scientists' Answers to Open Questions about Priority Audiences, Behavioural Goals, and Communication Objectives.** John C. Besley (*Michigan State University*), Markus Schug (*University of Augsburg*) & Anthony Dudo (*University of Texas*)

**5. Faith-Based Solutions to the Politicisation of Science.** Andrea Isabel López (*University of Wisconsin-Madison, United States*) & Dominique Brossard (*University of Wisconsin-Madison, United States*)

Session 3 Presentations (8 mins):

12:00 – 12:45

**Contested Scientific Authority Online:** Challenges for Audiences

**Chair: Niels G. Mede** (*Wageningen University & Research, The Netherlands*)

**1. Anticipating Controversy – Qualitative Analysis of Online Media Coverage and User Comments on Nutrition Research.** Charmaine Voigt (*University Rostock, Germany*)

**2. The Rhythm of Resonance: Tracing Temporal Actor Dynamics and Impulse Shocks of Public Attention in Polarised Discourses Around Science.** Johanna Klapproth (*University of Muenster, Germany*), Chris Tenove (*University of British Columbia, Canada*), Hossein Azarpanah (*University of British Columbia, Canada*), Connor Guyn (*University of British Columbia, Canada*), Heidi Tworek (*University of British Columbia, Canada*) & Thorsten Quandt (*University of Muenster, Germany*)

**3. Negotiating Trust and Credibility in Platformed Health Communication: Italian Adolescents' Evaluations of Health Content on TikTok and Instagram.** Francesco Vigneri (*Università Mercatorum, Italy*), Francesca Comunello (*Sapienza University of Rome, Italy*), Lorenza Parisi (*Sapienza University of Rome, Italy*) & Francesco Gesualdo (*University of Pisa, Italy*).

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LUNCH BREAK:

12:45 – 13:30

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Session 4 Presentations (8 mins):

13:30 – 14:30

**Misinformation, (Climate) Skepticism and Conspiracy Theories**  
**Chair: Mehita Iqani** (*Stellenbosch University, South Africa*)

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**1. Defending Science: The Use of Community Notes for Crowd-Sourced Fact-Checking on X.** Tracy Worrell (*Rochester Institute of Technology, United States*)

**2. Degrees of Facticity: Understanding Variation in Scientific Conspiracy Theory Beliefs.** Florian Wintterlin (*University of Muenster, Germany*) & Julia Metag (*University of Muenster, Germany*).

**3. Shifting Tides: Insights into the Continued Backlash in Public Opinion on Climate Change in Germany.** Anne Reif (*University of Hamburg, Germany*), Lars Guenther (*LMU Munich, Germany*) & Michael Brüggemann (*University of Hamburg, Germany*)

**4. Negotiating Climate Change, Climate Politics, and Climate Protest among Alternative Media Users: A Qualitative Longitudinal Study.** Katharina Schöppl (*University of Mannheim, Germany*) & Christian Schwarzenegger (*University of Bremen, Germany*)

Session 5 Presentations (8 mins):

14:30 – 15:45

**Communicating Challenging Science: Negativity, Uncertainty, Retractions**

**Chair: Bernhard Goodwin** (*LMU Munich, Germany*)

**1. Translating Science: Unpacking and Navigating Challenges in Antimicrobial Resistance Communication in Tanzania.** Rene Gerrets (*University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands*) & Peter Mangesho (*National Institute for Medical Research, Tanzania*)

**2. Co-constructing Public Understanding of Adult ADHD in Australia: Online Influencers, Popular Discourse and the Unsettled Science of Neurodiversity.** Harry Dugmore (*University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia*)

**3. Misrepresentation of Scientific Uncertainty - Automated Analysis of (Un)Certainty in Science Communication across Disciplines and Platforms.** Petro Tolochko (*University of Vienna, Austria*) & Jana Laura Egelhofer (*LMU Munich, Germany*)

**4. One Bad Apple or the Whole Bunch? The Asymmetric Effect of Scientific Retractions on Public Perceptions of Science.** Rod Abhari (*Northwestern University, United States*) & Nathan Walter (*Northwestern University, United States*)

**5. Cheerleading for science: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.** Jenni Metcalfe (*Australian National University*), Michelle Riedlinger (*Queensland University of Technology*), Fabien Medvecky (*Australian National University*)

COFFEE BREAK:

15:45 – 16:00

Panel Discussion:

16:00 – 16:45

**The "other dark side": Structural invisibility and the struggle for global voice in African science communication.**

**Chair: Marina Joubert** (*University of Stellenbosch, South Africa*)

**Panel members:** Wiida Basson, Sara Andreotti, Resia Pretorius, Martin Viljoen, Alec Basson, Maryke Hunter-Hüsselman, Desmond Thompson (*Stellenbosch University, South Africa*)

Closing Remarks and Goodbye

16:45 – 17:00

DRUMBA Drumming and Braai Dinner

17:00 ONWARDS

**Organizers:**

Jana Laura Egelhofer, Marina Joubert, Bernhard Goodwin, Mehita Iqani, Niels G. Mede, Janine N. Blessing, Alice Flerackers, John Besley, Friederike Hendriks, Nils Bienzeisler, Andreas Scheu, Maambebe Khosa, and Zani de Wit