



EXPLORING SCIENCE COMMUNICATION
IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS
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Between submitting my application for the College for Life Sciences Fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg and the start of my Fellowship, I shifted my project focus to examine science communication in digital environments, specifically YouTube. This shift was due in part to the success of my side project regarding the Flat Earth movement. My Fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg gave me the time to really delve into this new research area. In addition to submitting two papers for publication on the propagation of Flat Earth views on YouTube, my Fellowship at the Wiko facilitated many advantageous and noteworthy activities.

First, I was an invited participant in a two-day workshop focused on defining successful online behavior. The workshop was held in Berlin and was co-sponsored by the

Humboldt University Berlin, the Einstein Center Digital Future, and the University of Münster. The workshop was attended by distinguished experts at the intersection of science education and psychology, such as Rainer Bromme, Clark Chinn, and Deanna Kuhn, just to name a few. Had I not been in Berlin, I would have been unable to attend! From this workshop, we as a group aim to publish an essay on dealing with so-called “fake news”, apply for funding with the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) as a scientific network, and submit a symposium to the Public Communication of Science and Technology 2020 conference.

Second, I organized a small workshop at the Wissenschaftskolleg about communicating science on YouTube. This workshop was well attended by the social scientists and biologists at the Wiko. For this workshop, I invited Joachim Allgaier, who is an expert on health and science content on YouTube. Joachim discussed the history of science content on YouTube and described the current health and science content available on YouTube. In contrast, I discussed how people’s worldviews, values, and knowledge lead to the differential interpretation of information on YouTube. Importantly, prior to the workshop, I sat down with Joachim Allgaier and discussed my ideas for my future work in this area. He provided helpful feedback on a survey I designed to examine how people in the United States use YouTube.

Third, I was interviewed by the BBC. My research on the propagation of Flat Earth videos on YouTube was of great interest to the BBC, and because I was closer than normal (Texas is much farther away from London than is Berlin!), I was able to sit down for a taped interview. Two versions of this coverage are available, a radio report that appeared on the BBC Trending Podcast (“Is YouTube to blame for the rise of flat Earth?”) and a video interview (“Flat Earth: How did YouTube help spread a conspiracy theory?”). These interviews, in combination with coverage in the Guardian, led to my being contacted for an interview on CNN.

As an early-career scholar with a new faculty position, I was unable to stay at the Wiko for longer than three months. Although I still had some amazing opportunities during this time, there are so many more opportunities available to Wiko Fellows in which I would have liked to take part. Being back in Lubbock, Texas, I miss the lush grounds outside of the Villa Walther, watching the swans and coots swim on the water, and drinking Fritz-Kola. I miss the weekly colloquia and the spirited discussions that followed, even when the room grew almost intolerably warm. Most of all, I really miss the amazing meals provided by Dunia and her team. I hope that I will be considered for a full fellowship in the future.