Academic rigor, journalistic flair

Michael Benedik
Office of the Provost
Texas A&M University

The Conversation US – what is it?

• A new model that brings together best of both academic and journalistic worlds.
• An international network – TCUS launched October 2014
• Independent and non profit: supported by 10 foundations and 24 universities
• A small, start-up team of 12 editors in Boston, Atlanta & New York.
• Texas A&M is a founding partner
The Conversation US – what is it?
Improving the public discourse

“As the president of one of our country’s leading research university systems, I believe it is now incumbent on the academic community to ensure that the work and voices of researchers are front and center in the public square.”

Janet Napolitano

Why bring academics into the popular media?

• Enrich the public discourse.
• Share knowledge in universities.
• Explain big problems, offer solutions.
• Give academics a voice in scientific, cultural debates.
What’s in it for you, personally?

- Increase the visibility of you and your research with other media and other researchers (your reputation and institutional prestige)
- Extend the reach of your research
- Improve communication skills (learn from journalists)
- Demonstrate public engagement and impact of research and teaching to university

TCUS: How we’re distinct editorially

- Twin editorial aspirations:
  - Complement the news agenda: scholars give insight and context to stories in the headlines.
  - Set the public agenda: by sharing research and new thinking.
- All writers = researchers affiliated with academic institutions.
- Editors = journalists.
- Not an op-ed but explanatory journalism
- An editorial collaboration between scholar and journalist. This is about our authors’ voices but both sides must approve final copy.
Powerful republishing model

- Other media free to read and to republish through Creative Commons license
- Monthly unique visits to site: over half a million
- Through republication: over five million reads per month.
- Daily newsletter recipients: 32,000
- Dedicated “audience development” pros promote stories on social media and with republishers

Regular republishers

TIME  BUSINESS INSIDER  SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN™
THE HUFFINGTON POST

The Washington Post  U.S. News  QUARTZ  AP
Slate  THE RAW STORY

“PRI  Newsweek  the guardian  HOUSTON CHRONICLE

IF SCIENCE!  SALON
Is technology making us dumber or smarter? Yes

June 17, 2016, 10:33 AM EDT

Editor’s note: This article is part of our collaboration with Nieman Lab, a news organization. The original article can be found at www.niemanlab.org. The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University is the source of the article, and we are grateful for their support.

The smartphone in your hand, available in your pocket, in your pocketbook, or in your wallet, is the most powerful device in the world. It can store and retrieve information, communicate with others, control your home, and even drive your car. It is a tool that is used around the world. With your phone, you can navigate in cities, buy a car, track your vital signs and accomplish thousands of other tasks. In a word:

Each of these activities used to demand learning specific skills and acquiring the necessary resources to do them. Making a film? Get a movie camera and the accompanying technology (lights, actors, equipment). Second, learn how to

Your Smartphone Is Making You Dumber

Jonathan Coopersmith, Texas A&M University / The Conversation @ConversationUS

June 20, 2016

But also more productive

The smartphone in your hand enables you to record a video, edit it and send it around the world.

With your phone, you can navigate in cities, buy a car, track your vital signs and accomplish thousands of other tasks. And so?

Each of those activities used to demand learning specific skills and
So how do you do this?

• Where do our stories come from?
• How can we help you think like a journalist

Expert Requests

• Sent daily to media relations teams
• Topics we’d like to cover, but haven’t yet identified the right scholar
• Rely on media relations’ deep knowledge of faculty to help us connect with good experts
• Contact us before writing - don’t send full drafts
Pitch a story

- Write 1-3 sentence summary of the piece
- Assume a reader has no interest: explain why we should care
- Search the site: have we already covered this angle?
- How does your research add to the discussion already happening in the media?
- Don’t write before you’ve heard or spoken to an editor – more likely to be accepted as pitch than full article

Pitching – 4 important questions

- Is it of general interest?
- Are you an expert on the topic?
- Is it timely?
- Can you cover it in 1,000 words?
Types of stories

- News analysis – reaction to the news
- Report and explain new research/science
- Ideas from academia
- Part of a series in-depth series
- An “explainer” of topical issue

News analysis

- Reaction to an event or scholarly take to the news
New published research

New autism research: a nutrient called carnitine might counteract gene mutations linked with ASD risks

Authors
Yoko A. Terakawa
Department of Anatomy, Texas A&M University System Biomedical Research Center, Texas A&M University

Zhizhao Ye
Center for Neurosciences, Texas A&M University

Abstract
Newly published research suggests that the amino acid carnitine may counteract gene mutations linked with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) risks. The study, which was conducted by researchers at the Texas A&M University System Biomedical Research Center, found that carnitine supplementation was able to reduce the severity of symptoms in ASD models.

Cutting-edge ideas

Moving exoskeletons from sci-fi into medical rehabilitation and therapy

Authors
Hayato Kato
Doctoral Student, Mechanical Engineering, Texas A&M University

Kristina Pellegrini
PhD Candidate, Biomedical Engineering, Texas A&M University

Abstract
The development of exoskeletons has been a topic of interest in both scientific and medical communities. This study aimed to analyze the feasibility of using exoskeletons for medical rehabilitation purposes. The results indicate that exoskeletons can provide significant benefits in improving mobility and muscle strength in patients with various disabilities.
The art of the news peg

• Why now? An ongoing trend, an event, an anniversary?

An example would be discussing recent Nobel Prizes.

The “explainer”

• Pegged to recent events
• Based on your expertise
• Gets reader up to speed
Author’s final approval

Institutional metrics
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Feel free to contact me directly:
Michael Benedik
benedik@tamu.edu