

THE CONVERSATION US

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**



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The Conversation US – what is it?



How we're different | Our charter | A global network | Message from the Editor in Chief | We are a global media resource providing cutting edge ideas and people who know what they are talking about. Search our database of 30,000 experts. Plus, our content is used by 22,000 sites under Creative Commons. Absolutely free. That way, everyone gets better information.

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Arts + Culture | Economy + Business | Education | Environment + Energy | Health + Medicine | Politics + Society | Science + Technology | Election 2016

Follow Topics: Zika | Wildfire | Economic inequality | 2016 US Presidential Election | Robots | US gun control | policing in America | GM food

9/11 15th anniversary

Command under attack: What we've learned since 9/11 about managing crises
Herman B. "Dutch" Leonard, Harvard University; Arnold M. Howitt, Harvard University; Christine Cole, Harvard University, and Joseph W. Pfeifer, Harvard University
The National Incident Management System (NIMS), created after 9/11, has helped government agencies respond to large-scale emergencies, including mass shootings and the Boston Marathon bombing.
How the pain of 9/11 still stays with a generation

Rio Paralympics 2016

Read our coverage

Columnists

“No one – not even the poorest person on earth – lacks the means to be generous.”
Richard Gunderman

“There is no chance Philae's instruments will work, so why do we care so much?”
Monica Grady

Andrew J. Hoffman – “The scientific community has been unable or unwilling to explain their findings”
Jay L. Zagorsky – “A common misperception about Labor Day is we all get a day off. If only it were so”

More columnists

Research and Expert Database

Find experts with knowledge in:

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 more scientists are needed in the public square
October 13, 2015 6:46am EDT

Competing to explain science. Susan Merrell/UICSF, Author provided

Author
Janet Napolitano
President, University of California,
Office of the President

In this presidential election season, one thing is certain: candidates will rarely – if ever – be asked what they would do to keep this nation at the forefront of science and innovation.

That's a shame.

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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.

theguardian

Academics: leave your ivory towers and pitch your work to the media

Publishing in academic journals is prestigious, but sharing your ideas with a wider audience is exciting and full of unexpected rewards



“People always say I’m a good writer, but I’m shy.” Photograph: Alamy

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

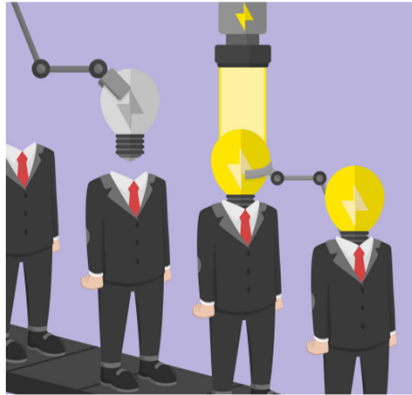


Republication Example



Is technology making us dumber or smarter? Yes

June 17, 2016 10:41am EDT



Is this happening to us? And is it good? Assembly line illustration from shutterstock.com

Editor's note: This article is part of our collaboration with Point Taken, a new program from WGBH that will next air on Thursday, June 21 on PBS and online at pts.org. The show features fact-based debate on major issues of the day, without the shouting.

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 acquiring the necessary resources to do them. Making a film? First, get a movie camera and the supporting technologies (film, lights, editing equipment). Second, learn how to use them and hire a crew. Third, shoot the movie. Fourth, develop and edit the

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Disclosure statement

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Republication Example



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Your Smartphone Is Making You Dumber

IDEAS TECHNOLOGY

Your Smartphone Is Making You Dumber

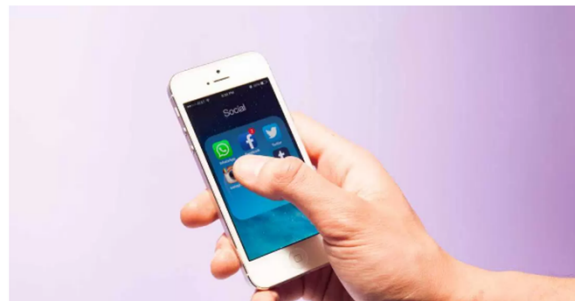
Jonathan Coopersmith, Texas A&M University / The Conversation @ConversationUS | June 20, 2016



IDEAS 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



Watch Sully the Hudson River Airline Pilot Star as Tom Hanks in the Movie of His Life

How to Turn Life's Challenges Into Play

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

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair

Welcome to our service for university media teams and colleagues. Each morning you will receive this email listing the stories we are pursuing and seeking your suggestions for academic writers.

In addition to [your pitches](#), today we are looking for:

1. Politics and Society: As the showdown over the empty Supreme Court seat and the debate over whether the Court has become more politically partisan continue, we are looking for a scholar who can shed light on public attitudes toward the Supreme Court and how they have evolved over time. In what years, for example, was trust in the Court at a high point? at a low point? and why?

Contact: Maria Balinska maria_balinska@theconversation.com
Timeline: Please be in touch before the end of the week

2. Politics and Society: Donald Trump and indeed all the GOP candidates are vociferous in their denunciation of the government (particularly the federal government). There may have always been a distrust of the central authorities in US history but have we now reached a nadir in the relationship between the people and Washington? We are interested in scholars who can look at this relationship and place it in historical context – whether it be from the perspective of opinion surveys or popular culture.

Contact: Maria Balinska maria_balinska@theconversation.com
Timeline: Please be in touch by end of week

3. Arts and Culture: In a recent Psychology Today article, a writer used a German term – *Backpfeifengesicht* (literally, a "face in need of a good punch") – to describe Ted Cruz. We're looking for an academic to write a short article that highlights some of the quirkiest / most interesting German words. What is it about the German language that allows for such constructions? In English, why can't there be similar words for complex feelings or extremely specific things?

Contact: Nick Lehr nick_lehr@theconversation.com
Timeline: 600 word draft submitted by March 3

4. Science and Technology: Pi Day approaches! Calling mathematicians, engineers, and physicists: what is known or possible only because we understand Pi? What important discoveries were made based on our knowledge of Pi?

Contact: Jeff Inglis jeff_inglis@theconversation.com
Timeline: Contact editor by Friday, March 4

Ari Fertig
Editorial Liaison
[The Conversation US](http://TheConversationUS.com)

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

David Duke, Donald Trump and the dog whistle

August 25, 2016 by Keith Gaddy

David Duke, the blow-dried wizard of Louisiana politics, is back. This time he is running to represent Louisiana in the U.S. Senate.

When asked by journalist Tyler Bridges if he appeared in the same voters as Donald Trump, Duke replied:

“I’m getting the same kind of votes that I have gotten in Louisiana. I’m getting the same kind of votes that Phil Buckman got. I’m getting the same votes as George Willard.”

As scholars of southern politics, political campaigns and public opinion, we thought Duke’s case had come and gone. His resurgence during the deeply divisive Donald Trump presidential campaign gives resonance to William Faulkner’s observation in “Baptism for a New” that “the past isn’t dead, it isn’t even past.”

The seeds for Duke’s resurgence as a candidate – ironically enough, we contend – were sown by the election of the nation’s first African American president. Rather than bridging racial divides, those divides have deepened over the course of Barack Obama’s administration. Issues not traditionally associated with race, such as health care, have become racialized. CM-fach-schwer and migration racism has replaced the white, redneck and unspoken symbols racism that has defined the past several decades.

What Duke represented and still represents – the lingering state of racial resentment – remains an unfortunate but resilient strand of American political thought. In the America of 2016, racism can put down their dog whistles and just yell for their dogs.

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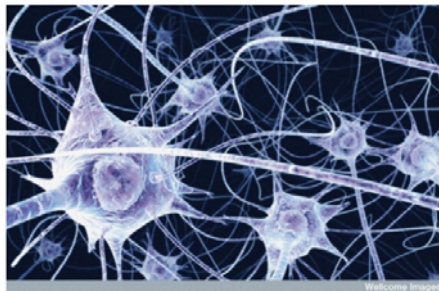
AMERICAN

New published research



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

April 13, 2016 6:01am EDT



Deficiencies in a critical nutrient can lead to an abnormally wired brain. Illustration of a network of nerve cells in the brain. [Wellcome Images](#)

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) affect about [one percent](#) of the world's population. In the United States alone, about [1 in 68 children](#) are on the spectrum, and between [40 and 60 percent](#) of them are also diagnosed with some degree of intellectual disability. The annual cost associated with ASD in the United States is high - [previously estimated to be US\\$206-\\$262 billion](#). If diagnoses continue to grow at the current pace, it will exceed [\\$660 billion by 2023](#), more than the total cost of diabetes.

Scientists still aren't sure what causes ASD, but evidence suggests it's probably the result of complex interactions between genetic and environmental factors that affect brain development. So far hundreds of genes whose mutations are associated with ASD have been identified.

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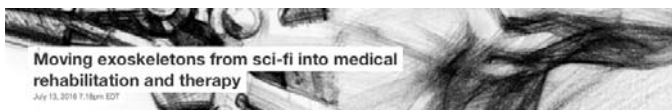
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Cutting-edge ideas



Moving exoskeletons from sci-fi into medical rehabilitation and therapy

July 13, 2016 7:16am EDT

Is this the future of physical therapy?

Chances are, you've seen a person using a powered exoskeleton - what you might think of as a sort of bionic suit - but only in [the movies](#). In the 2008 movie "T3n3t3" for example, Matt Damon's character has an exoskeleton that makes his body stronger and faster than it would otherwise be. Simply described, they are devices that can be externally worn, reconfiguring the skeleton of the body part they are attached to and able to provide support in many ways.

This technology isn't just in science fiction, it [exists today](#) and has even been [commercialized](#). It supports devices that [enhance human strength](#), [assist disabled people](#) and even [assist rehabilitation after injuries](#). Our work focuses on helping stroke patients' recovery.

Every year, [13 million](#) people worldwide suffer a stroke. More than 83 percent of them survive, but only [10 percent](#) recover completely. The rest must deal with [mobility impairments](#) and [cognitive disabilities](#).

Stroke victims can get help relearning skills they have lost or learn new ways of performing tasks to compensate for lost abilities. The most effective rehabilitation is specific to the skills the patient needs, and of [sufficient intensity](#) and duration to truly retrain the nerves and muscles involved. However, the number of trained human therapists who can provide this support is limited, while the [demand](#) is growing, particularly as populations [age](#).



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The art of the news peg

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

How does a computer know where you're looking?

August 30, 2016 10:15am EDT

Why Prince's music will become more accessible after his death
April 28, 2016 6:21am EDT

Most of Prince's work still remains private.

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Disclosure statement
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Last Thursday, the world was shocked by the untimely death of Prince, the highly prolific, Grammy-winning music icon who not only transformed music and the record industry but also provoked questions about race, gender and sexuality.

Apart from his songs, musical genius and virtuosic skills, the "Purple Rain" singer is also widely recognized for his fierce protection of artistic freedom and his longstanding fight with his first record label, Warner Bros.

It seems only a few years ago that he performed in concerts with the word "live" written on his face. Partly as an act of protest, he also changed his name to an unrecognizable symbol, causing people to refer to him as "the artist formerly known as Prince."

In the past few years, the singer remained reluctant to work with internet streaming platforms. Today, his music remains largely unavailable on Spotify and Apple Music. A rare exception is Jay Z's *Tidal*, which released his "HITHEAVEN" album.

Commentators have been quick to discuss Prince's positions on intellectual property rights and the music business. We, few have explored whether Prince's music will become more readily available after his death.

Although it is difficult to predict how his unshared materials will be handled – considering that he does not have any apparent heir – a quick review of what happened after the death of other famously reclusive artists may offer some useful hints.



How much information is too much? And where should it go? Heads-up display image from shutterstock.com

Imagine driving a car, using a heads-up display projection on the windshield to navigate through an unfamiliar city. This is augmented reality (AR), the information is used to not only guide you along a route, but also to alert you to salient information in your surroundings, such as bicycles or pedestrians. The correct placement of virtual content is not only crucial, but perhaps a matter of life and death.

Information can't obscure other material, and should be displayed long enough for you to understand it, but not too much longer than that. Computer systems have to make these determinations in real-time, without causing any of the information to be distracting or obtrusive. We certainly don't want a warning about a cyclist about to cross in front of the car to obscure the cyclist herself!

As a researcher in AR, I spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to get the right information onto a user's screen, in just the right place, at just the right moment. I've learned that slowing



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An example would be discussing recent Nobel Prizes

The "explainer"

- Pegged to recent events
- Based on your expertise
- Gets reader up to speed

Four quotes from the sixth GOP presidential debate, explained by experts

January 15, 2016 1:11pm EST



Trump and Cruz during the GOP debate, round 6, North Charleston, South Carolina, January 14, 2016. Photo by Michael Grecco

Editor's note: Seven candidates took part in Thursday's mainstage presidential debate in North Charleston, South Carolina – the sixth debate between the GOP candidates, Donald Trump, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, Ben Carson, Florida Senator Marco Rubio, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, Ohio Governor John Kasich and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie struggled to stand out in a shrinking field. Our panel of scholars listened and picked one quote to analyze.

Harold Ainsam, UC Hastings

"When you look at the 'line of migration, you see no women. Where are the women? I see no women... I see strong, powerful men." – Donald Trump

This is factually wrong. According to State Department data, in the last fiscal year the United States admitted 1,682 Syrian refugees, 77 percent of whom were women and children. But in addition to the inaccuracy, it is also irresponsible reliance on crime stereotypes.

One of the main issues identified by scholars studying the intersection of immigration and crime ("criminalization") is the blurrier of these categories by stigmatize immigrants and crim-



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Author's final approval



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HeadLine

Saving lives by letting cars talk to each other

1,081 words Readability

The [death of a person](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/business/self-driving-tesla-fatal-crash-investigation.html) earlier this year while driving with Autopilot in a Tesla sedan, along with [news of more crashes](http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-36783345) involving Teslas operating in Autopilot, has triggered a torrent of [concerns about the safety of self-driving cars](http://www.npr.org/2016/07/01/484381632/tesla-autopilot-crash-raises-concerns-about-self-driving-cars).

Requirements

Collaborators

- Jeff Inglis Editor
- Huei Peng Lead Author

Interviewees

Disclosures

- Huei Peng

Huei Peng receives funding from 60 companies – their membership fee supports the research and

Institutional metrics

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Feedback? The Conversation Analytics is currently in beta. We welcome your feedback / suggestions, and are here to help.

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Summary Articles Authors Publishers Global Compare

November 12 2014 – November 7 2016



Institutional metrics

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