

Blogging on the ice: connecting audiences with climate-change sciences

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Climate change is a perennially controversial subject frequently splashed across mainstream headlines. However, what we see in the news is not always what the scientists at the front line of climate change experience. Some scientists have been trying to counteract these misconceptions via citizen journalism and directly connecting with the public through blogging rather than official media channels.

Bournemouth University's (BU) Dr Einar Thorsen has spent several years researching [citizen journalism](#) around the globe with a particular interest in the polar regions. Growing up in Norway he had admiration for Norwegian national heroes – the polar explorers Nansen and Amundsen – but it was as an adult while co-editing "Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives" that Dr Thorsen got to combine his personal and professional interests.

He set about some polar exploring of his own, looking at the idea of citizen journalism as an education tool and the extent to which scientists achieve an unmediated form of communication through their blogging. The International Polar Year (2007-2008) was an obvious starting point for the research with a huge increase in the number of blogs originating from and written "on the ice". Focusing on the uses and decision-making behind blogging, Dr Thorsen analysed over 50 Antarctic blogs published throughout the period and interviewed several of the bloggers involved.

Much of the media reporting on climate change and polar issues is through the lens of staged pseudo-events or celebrity campaigners such

as Al Gore. The Antarctic blogs, whether official or personal, raise awareness of climate change issues and communicate directly with the public on current polar projects and life on the ice. Scientists writing them are acutely aware of their role as ambassadors for polar sciences and many blogs are used as educational tools, connecting scientists with classrooms and establishing a means of direct dialogue with students. They also shed light onto scientific processes, as Dr Thorsen explains, "Popularising the process of scientific enquiry is an incredibly powerful tool to help engage people and explain what can often be complicated scientific findings."

The research concluded that as a form of citizen journalism, science blogging is here to stay. Dr Thorsen believes it is unlikely to overtake traditional media channels but instead will complement established environmental and science reporting. He said, "Journalists can use scientists' blogs to connect with a broader range of sources and link out to their blogs to provide audiences with better context for their work."

Dr Thorsen's work, "Blogging on the ice: connecting audiences with [climate-change](#) sciences" was published as an article in the International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics, and his findings also appeared as a chapter in the book, "Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives", co-edited with Professor Stuart Allan. Making his research findings open access was important to Dr Thorsen, as his research "is concerned with examining how journalism, in different ways, engenders societal change or holds power to account, it is crucial that it has as wide a reach as possible. "I want to encourage both scholarly and public engagement with my findings, and have a tangible impact upon my area of research, so publishing open access is crucial to this endeavour."

Further research on citizen journalism is underway with indigenous peoples in the Arctic region and finding out how their blogging could drive change on major environmental and cultural issues.

More information: "Blogging on the ice: Connecting audiences with climate-change sciences." *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 9 (1), 87 – 101

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