

The astronomy press release system of UFRJ/SAB

Douglas F. Martins¹, Eduardo M. Pereira¹, Catarina V. Lencioni², & Thiago S. Gonçalves¹

¹ Observatório do Valongo, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, e-mail: douglasm13@astro.ufrj.br

² Escola de Comunicação, e-mail: catarinalencioni@gmail.com

Abstract. The outreach of the Brazilian astronomers researches is a fundamental key for bringing visibility to astronomy wide nationally. Not only it raises public awareness regarding the work performed in Brazil, the astronomy dissemination promotes and stimulates the science produced here. However, the currently main astronomy diffusion sources in Brazil have been enthusiasts and amateurs, what devalues the role of the professional astronomer. As part of the issue is due to the absence of an intermediate for astronomers and the press, this project precisely aims to play the role of a communicator agent, acting between science research and outreach. Our team focuses particularly on press releases production through a simple and direct template: we contact the authors of a potentially public-interesting research; if agreed, we step into the process of producing an accessible comprehension text about the research, in order to deliver it to journalists. Moreover, we also make use of modern tools, such as and especially social media, aiming to increase the trustworthy information reach. Since the beginning of this project, last February, two press releases have been finished, and two others are currently under production process. Furthermore, the use of social media has brought satisfying results, as we shall present using the available statistics tools.

Resumo. A divulgação da pesquisa feita por astrônomos brasileiros é peça fundamental para a visibilidade da astronomia em âmbito nacional. Além de promover e estimular a ciência feita no Brasil, a difusão traz conscientização por parte da população sobre os estudos realizados pelos pesquisadores do nosso país. Entretanto, as principais fontes de divulgação astronômica no Brasil vêm sendo entusiastas e amadores, desvalorizando o papel do astrônomo profissional. Como parte do problema se deve à ausência de um mediador entre astrônomos e jornalistas, nosso projeto visa justamente desempenhar o papel de agente comunicador intermediário entre a pesquisa e a divulgação. O foco principal deste trabalho é levar a pesquisa em astronomia desenvolvida no país à grande imprensa, mais especificamente investindo na produção de press releases. Seguindo o modelo linear para o processo de comunicação científica, consideramos a seguinte metodologia: estabelecemos contato com um autor de uma pesquisa em astronomia com potencial midiático; uma vez concordado, redigimos um texto de compreensão acessível sobre o estudo para que possa ser distribuído aos jornalistas. Através deste procedimento, produzimos em média um release a cada duas semanas. Além disso, também buscamos aproveitar as mídias sociais através de publicações de notícias sobre astronomia em um contexto geral, objetivando ampliar o alcance da informação fidedigna. Até agora este ferramental retornou considerável sucesso, como apontaremos através das estatísticas disponíveis, apresentando os resultados e conclusões obtidos nos primeiros seis meses de trabalho.

Keywords. Miscellaneous

1. Who are the science communicators?

One can easily notice that all major astronomy outreach channels in Brazil are led by enthusiasts and amateurs. In great part, this is due to a lack of interest from the academic community in bridging the gap between scientists and the press. The end result is that the public is more aware of research developed in North America and Europe than that originated in Brazil. In that context, this project aims to play the role of a communicator agent, or a public information officer (PIO), acting as said connection between scientific research and the public.

2. The linear model for science communication

The linear model is one of the simplest and most used models to describe the communication process. It depicts a unidirectional flow of information in which the message follows a straight line, starting at the sender and ending at the receiver, without any feedback from the latter (Christensen, 2007). The layout displayed in Figure 1 represents the information flow from the scientist (sender) down to the public (receiver). The gradient from blue to orange denotes a simplification of the information. Once the journalists obtain the final word from the PIOs, the information may be published. Thus, our biggest concern as PIOs is to ensure that the information produced by the scientists becomes

accessible and attractive to the journalists, which leads us to the main stage of this project.

3. Production of press releases

Our main focus is to take astronomy research developed in Brazil to the mainstream media, more specifically investing in production of press releases. The process occurs through the following steps:

1. Contact with the author(s) of a study with high potential to attract public interest;
2. following an interview with the author(s), composition of an accessible text (in layman's terms) about the research;
3. editing, and (with the author's consent) distribution of the text to the press.

4. Finished releases

For six months, starting in February, we have tested our methodology and functionality, resulting in press releases on the following scientific papers:

- “Segregation effects in DEEP2 galaxy groups”, Nascimento et al., 2016

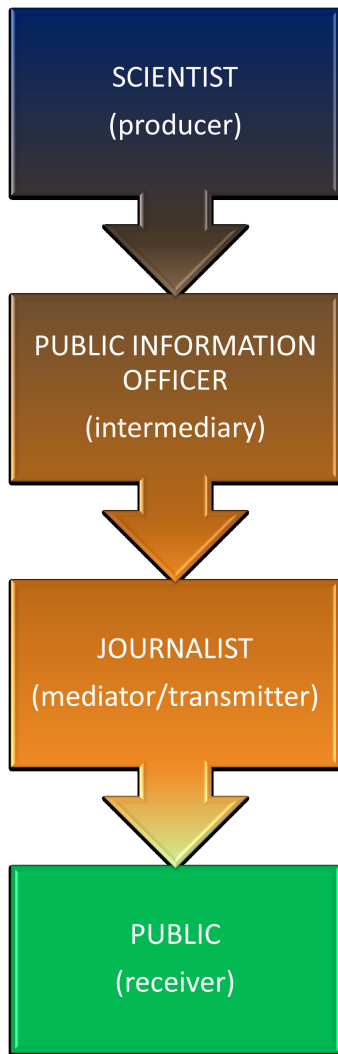


FIGURE 1. Representation of the linear model of communication applied for science outreach: the information path from the scientist to the public.

- “The fate of the gaseous disks of galaxies that fall into clusters” (published on SAB’s webpage), Ruggiero&Lima-Neto, 2017
- “Gemini NIFS survey of feeding and feedback processes in nearby Active Galaxies: I - Stellar kinematics”, Riffel et al., 2017
- “The abundance of compact quiescent galaxies since $z \sim 0.6$ ”, Charbonnier et al., 2017

5. Social media support

We also emphasize the relevance of social media (such as Facebook) regarding the popularization and visibility of activities developed in scientific institutions. Since February we have also produced content for the Valongo Observatory Facebook fanpage; Figure 2 (above) shows individuals reached during and before this period. The blue points indicate cumulative reach for all publications after our project started, while the red points show these values for a similar duration preceding this work.

6. Perspectives for the future

Following this initial phase of training, we expect to increase our output and achieve an average rate of one release every

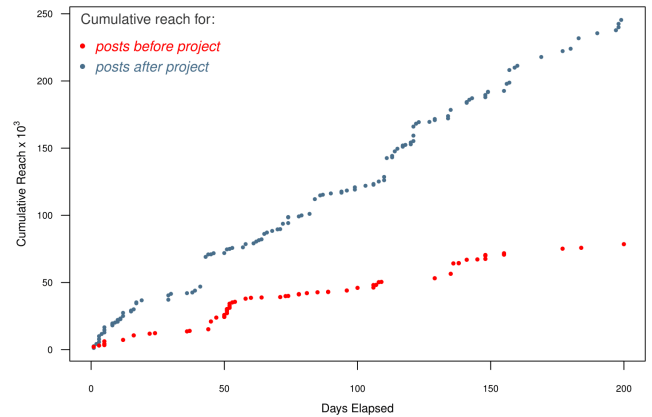


FIGURE 2. Plot comparing the cumulative reaches before and after our work for the Valongo Observatory facebook fan page.

two weeks, in order to establish a continuous dialog with the press. We also plan to establish partnerships with the major main science outreach actors in Brazil, in an attempt to take advantage of their reach and extended audience while providing content that reflects national research projects.

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank PROFAEx, from Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, for financial support.

References

- Christensen, L. L. 2007, in *The hands-on guide for science communicators: A step-by-step approach to public outreach*, Springer Science & Business Media
- Nascimento, Ribeiro & Lopes 2016, *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, 464, 183
- Ruggiero & Lima Neto 2017, *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, 468, 4107
- Riffel et al. 2017, *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, 470, 992
- Charbonnier et al. 2017, *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, 469, 4523