

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Calling Planet Earth: Large Engagement and Communications Initiatives (6)

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HOW IS THE SPACE COMMUNITY RESPONDING TO MISLEADING INFORMATION AND
SCIENCE SCEPTICISM?

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to delve into the communication challenges of space science and activities, and to focus on the individual and collective capabilities, hereby replying to the call of the 2024 IAC theme of a “Responsible Space for Sustainability”.

Acknowledging the contemporary global risks of misinformation and disinformation leading to an exacerbated polarization and a certain degree of public crisis of trust in science, this study seeks to comprehensively explore the space-related aspects.

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a dramatic example of the acceleration of science mistrust, severely affecting social harmony and human well-being. Similar kind of considerations are happening with the consensus on climate change and other important critical issues such as advancements in space technology.

The space domain is inherently complex and, since its inception, fertile ground for disinformation and conspiracy theories, difficult to eradicate as the moon landing denial. Furthermore, the emergence of new space faring nations and of a dynamic private sector, driven by visionary entrepreneurs, have added complexity to the landscape.

How are the already disoriented citizens reacting to ambitious plans for Mars colonisation, the accelerated adoption of space technology, including artificial intelligence, and the alarmism on space debris and possible space warfare?

The study investigates the social dimension of science and the need to provide a positive narrative, from the accurate use of words in space exploration to emphasising the opportunities and not solely highlighting risks.

The research reveals how a process of discussion and involvement among all actors could be created, including the many and contradictory reasons, and how the social expectation can be replied to. And, more importantly, it contributes to the understanding of what are the individual and collective capabilities to overcome misleading information, junk science and ensure a sustainable future for space.