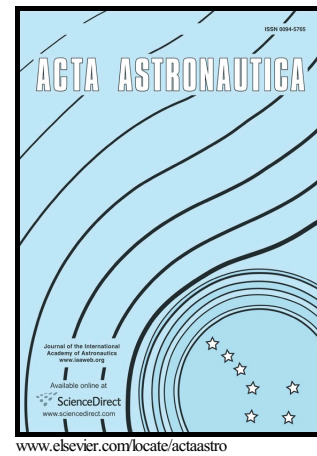


#FoundThem - 21st Century Pre-Search and Post-Detection SETI Protocols for Social and Digital Media

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PII: S0094-5765(15)30124-7
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.actaastro.2016.05.008>
Reference: AA5816

To appear in: *Acta Astronautica*
Accepted date: 8

Cite this article as: Duncan Forgan and Alexander Scholz, #FoundThem - 21st Century Pre-Search and Post-Detection SETI Protocols for Social and Digital Media, *Acta Astronautica*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.actaastro.2016.05.008>

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#FoundThem - 21st Century Pre-Search and Post-Detection SETI Protocols for Social and Digital Media

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Abstract

The transmission of news stories in global culture has changed fundamentally in the last three decades. The general public are alerted to breaking stories on increasingly rapid timescales, and the discussion/distortion of facts by writers, bloggers, commenters and Internet users can also be extremely fast. The narrative of a news item no longer belongs to a small cadre of conventional media outlets, but is instead synthesised to some level by the public as they select where and how they consume news.

The IAA Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) post-detection protocols, initially drafted in 1989 and updated in 2010, were written to guide SETI scientists in the event of detecting evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence, but do not give guidance as to how scientists should prepare to navigate this media maelstrom. The protocols assume communication channels between scientists and the public still resemble those of 1989, which were specifically one-way with a narrative controlled by a select few media outlets.

Modern SETI researchers must consider this modern paradigm for consumption of news by the public, using social media and other non-traditional outlets, when planning and executing searches for extraterrestrial intelligence. We propose additions to the post detection protocols as they pertain to the use of the Internet and social media, as well as pre-search protocols. It is our belief that such protocols are necessary if there is to be a well-informed, sane global conversation amongst the world's citizens following the discovery of intelligent life beyond the Earth.

Keywords: SETI, Astrobiology, protocols, science communication

Introduction

A critical concern for scientists pursuing the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) is the reaction of the world to the knowledge that humans are not the only technological civilisation in the Universe. The “culture shock” that results from such an epoch-making discovery has been the subject of intense discussion (cf Almár and Tarter 2011, Almár 2011, Elliott and Baxter 2012).

We can only guess at human civilisation's response to discovering ETI, but we are afforded clues by some events in recent history. A famous example is the “War of the Worlds” radio broadcast, which purported to describe a true invasion of the Earth by Martians (Cantril 1940). Reactions to the news

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