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Talking Physics: Can Social Media Teach HEP to Converse Again?

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Og, commonly recognized as one of the earliest contributors to experimental particle physics, began his career by smashing two rocks together, then turning to his friend Zog and stating those famous words “oogh oogh”. It was not the rock-smashing that marked HEP’s origins, but rather the sharing of information, which then allowed Zog to confirm the important discovery, that rocks are indeed made of smaller rocks.

Over the years, Socrates and other great teachers developed the methodology of this practice. Yet, as small groups of friends morphed into large classrooms of students, readers of journals, and audiences of television viewers, science conversation evolved into lecturing and broadcasting. While information is still conveyed in this manner, the invaluable, iterative nature of question/response is often lost or limited in duration.

The birth of Web 2.0 and the development of Social Media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and Google +, are allowing iterative conversation to reappear in nearly every aspect of communication. From comments on public articles and publications to “wall” conversations and tweets, physicists are finding themselves interacting with the public before, during and after publication. I discuss both the danger and the powerful potential of this phenomenon, and present methods currently used in HEP to make the best of it.

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