



Universität
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Making research and innovation visible: Opportunities and challenges of science communication by companies

Dr. Sophia Charlotte Volk

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Opportunities and challenges of science communication by companies



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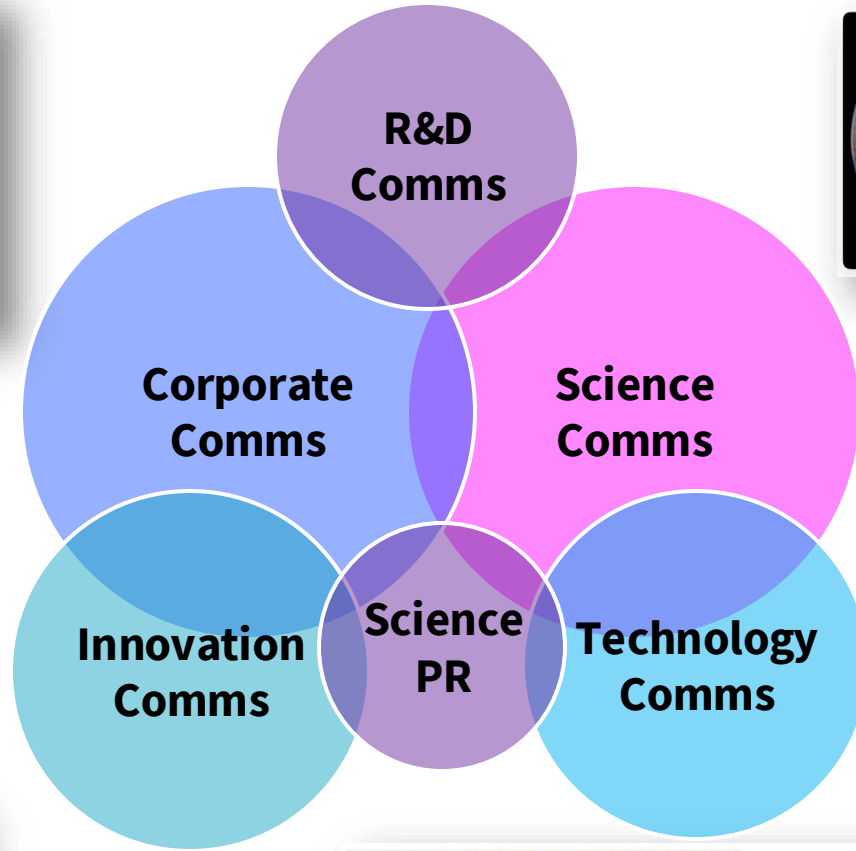


Susanne
Straetmans *(Pfizer
Europe)*



Florian Dieckmann
(Grünenthal)

Companies invest in research & development – but (how) do they communicate about it?



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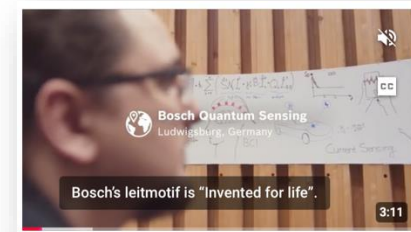
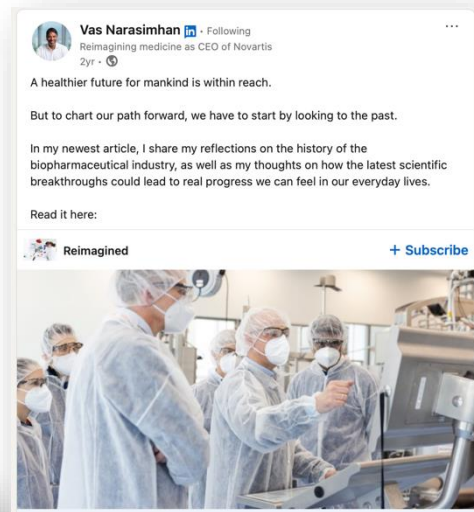
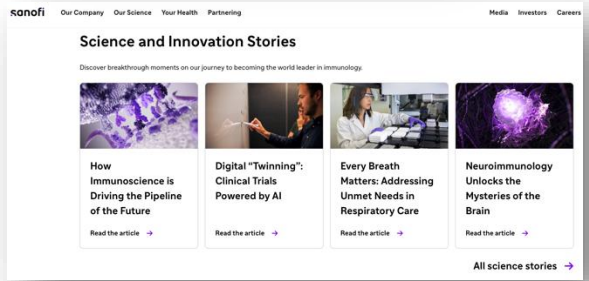
Science Will Win

Pfizer

BIOWISSENSCHAFTEN · WÖCHENTLICH

Science Will Win is a podcast that takes listeners under the microscope of some of the most promising medical innovations, exploring therapies that have the potential to shape the future of healthcare and offer new

▶ **Neueste Folge**



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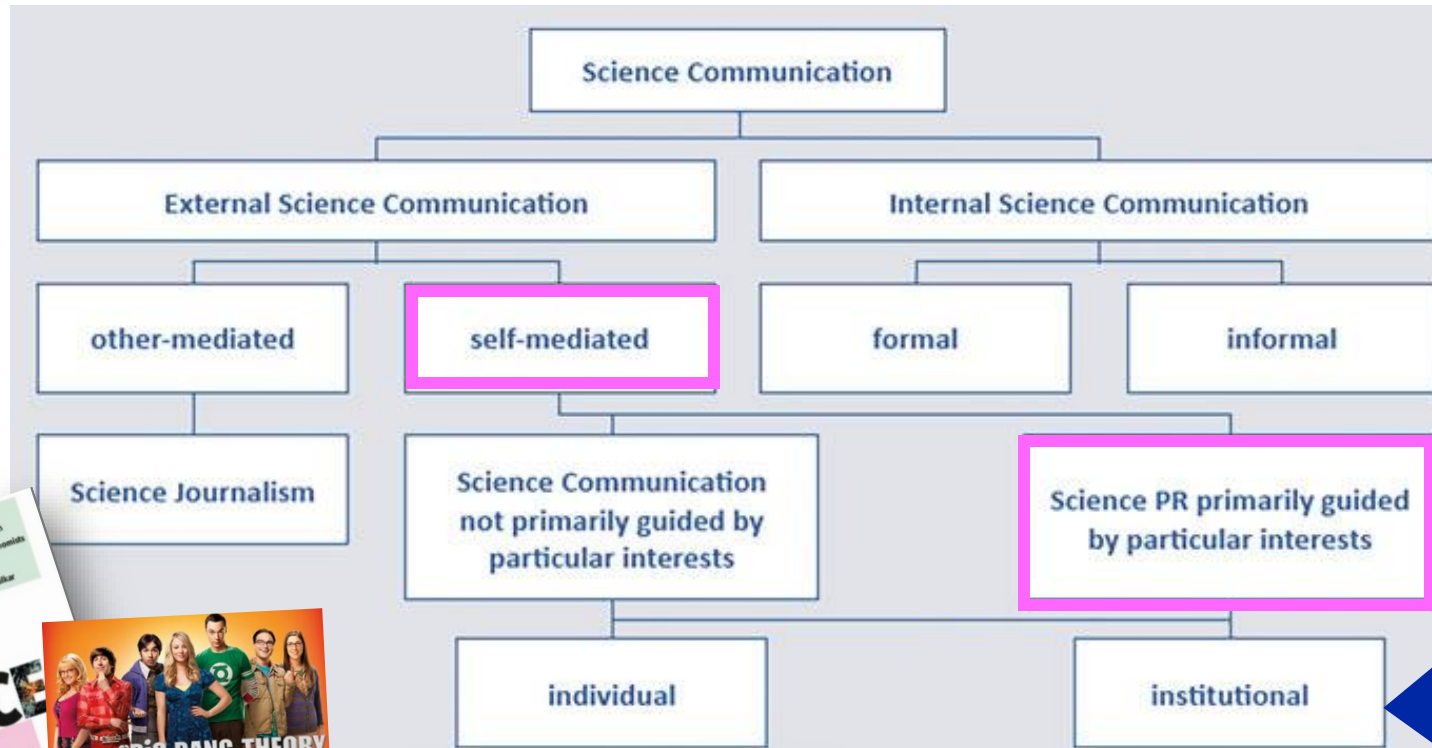
Untertitel



Companies can play an important role in science communication

defined broadly as communication from and about science, including its production, content, use, and effects

(Bucchi & Trench 2021; Davies & Horst 2016; Schäfer et al. 2015)



acatech et al. 2017, 21; Wormer, 2020

Corporate science communication

defined as companies' communication that is related to science, research, innovation, or science-related topics (e.g. Chu et al., 2024; Röttger, 2017; Waymer & Hill, 2023)

to a non-scientific audience: e.g. the public, consumers, industry partners, investors, regulators (e.g. Horst & Davis, 2021; VanDyke & Lee, 2020)



Companies remain little visible actors in science communication – and little researched

Practice discourse dominated by public research institutions, with few initiatives addressing or actively involving companies

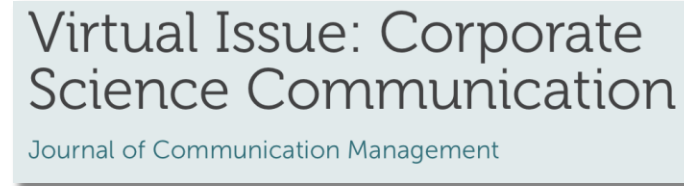
Scientific discourse has largely ignored companies, emphasizing problematic and omitting positive implications



#FactoryWisskomm

Wissenschaftskommunikation in der Industrie

Die Arbeitsgruppe widmet sich der wenig betrachteten Rolle forschender Unternehmen in der Wissenschaftskommunikation. Geplant sind Veranstaltungen mit unterschiedlichen Partnern und Input durch Studien, die sich mit der Schnittstelle von Wissenschaftskommunikation und Wirtschaft befassen.



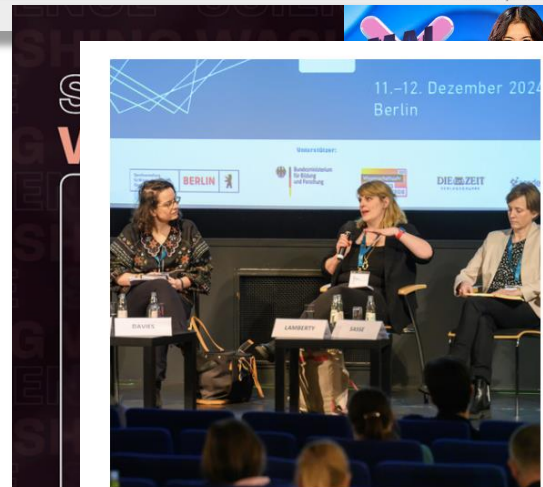
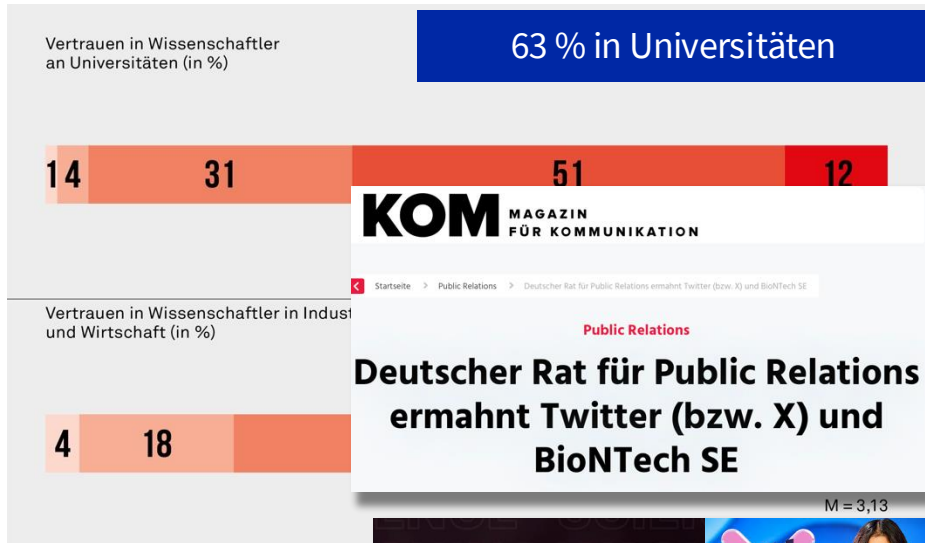
Corporate science communication yields various opportunities

- **Trust in industry research and acceptance for innovations:** fostering societal trust and acceptance in new innovations and technologies, mitigating skepticism against industry science (Critchley & Nicol, 2011)
- **Visibility and reputation for research:** showcasing research findings, gaining visibility as a relevant actor or sponsor of scientific research (e.g. Eberl, 2012)
- **Public understanding and engagement with science:** simplifying complex research and innovations, providing access to science or STEM education for young students (Röttger, 2017; Sultan et al., 2024)
- **Product marketing and sales:** promoting sales of new innovative products and solutions (e.g. Berkowitz, 2022; Eberl, 2012)
- **Innovation potential:** positioning as innovator and ‘thought leader’ relevant for strategic R&D partnerships, joint ventures, etc. (Eberl, 2012; Schramm et al., 2022; Zerfaß & Huck, 2007)
- **Employer brand:** attracting and maintaining skilled researchers and R&D managers, empowering researchers to communicate (Eberl, 2012)



But science communication from the industry is also faced with peculiar challenges

WIE HOCH IST IHR VERTRAUEN IN DIE WISSENSCHAFT?



Debatte über Desinformation: Ein Plädoyer für eine starke Wisskomm

- **Low(er) public trust and credibility:** lower trust compared to public research institutions (e.g. WissBarometer 2016), simplistic picture of «good science – evil industry»
- **Commercial interests vs. scientific principles:** communication faced with conflict of interests e.g. about transparency, objectivity, limitations (Bauer, 2008; Lewandowsky et al., 2012)
- **Communication logics vs. strict regulation:** communication in healthcare subject to regulation (esp. HWG)
- **Accusations of «sciencewashing»:** selective, exaggerated, or misleading scientific claims and language to enhance credibility (Gatti et al., 2025; Borie & Bracking, 2024; Siegel & Terdenge, 2023)
- **Scientific disinformation and science denialism:** combatting disinfo as a potential business risk ('antivaxx', AI skeptics) (Mahl et al., 2021; Wickert et al., 2016; Montgomery et al., 2024)
- **Internal structures and communication training:** cross-divisional collaboration with researchers and R&D, lack of training offers in science communication, incentives?

So, how do companies leverage the potential of science communication and deal with challenges?



Susanne
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Europe*)



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Outlook: Ongoing and planned research on the topic

1

Masterarbeit @Uni Leipzig/Zürich (Franziska Wehr, laufend)

- Potenziale für die unternehmerische Wissenschaftskommunikation
- Fallstudien mit forschenden Pharmaunternehmen in Deutschland
- ca. 30 min. Experteninterviews mit 3-4 Kommunikationsverantwortlichen im Juni 2025



2

Corporate Science Communication (COSCOM) (project proposal under review; start in 2026)

- Focus on top three R&D industries: pharmaceuticals, automotive, technology
- Target group: (a) corporate (science) communicators, (b) researchers, (c) R&D and innovation managers
- Focus: HOW science and research is communicated, by WHOM, and with WHAT positive and negative impact?
- Goal: best practices, guidelines for good scicomm, dialog platform

WP 1: Mapping Corporate Science Communication

- **RQa** What formats and content are used in COSCOM and how does it influence media coverage?

WP 2: Corporate Perspective

- **RQ:** How do communicators, researchers and R&D managers perceive their roles, opportunities and challenges of COSCOM?

WP 3: Intermediary Perspective

- **RQ:** How do intermediaries evaluate the risks and benefits of COSCOM, and how do they expose or support sciencewashing?

WP 4: Audience Perspective

- **RQ:** Which factors influence public trust in COSCOM and perceptions of sciencewashing?

WP 5: Advancing Corporate Science Communication

- **RQ:** What measures can enhance the positive impacts of COSCOM while mitigating its negative impacts?

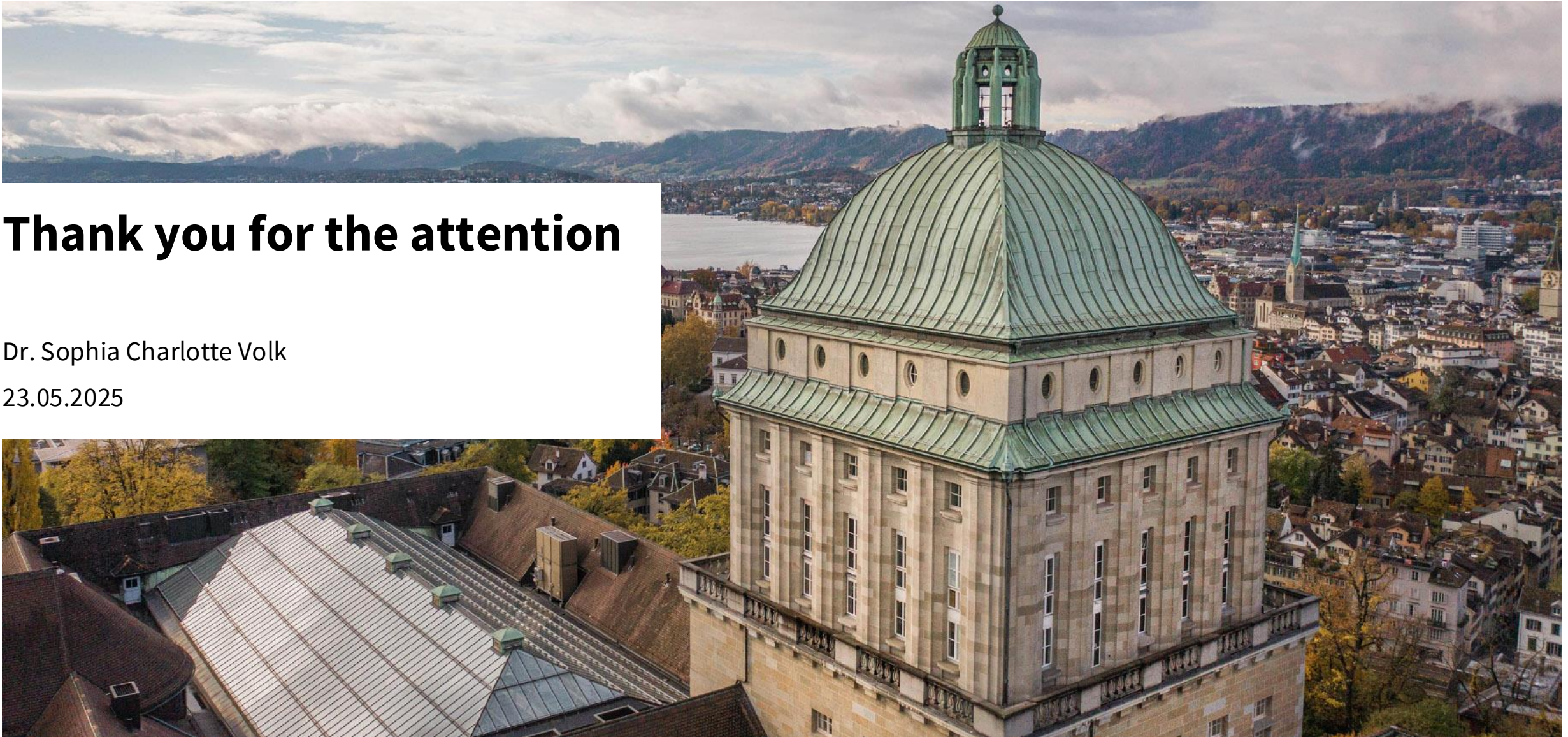


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Thank you for the attention

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