User Timelines in Twitter API v1.1

As some people may have noticed, the Chem Twitterverse box has been broken for the past two weeks while Twitter migrated from v1.0 of their API to v1.1. It took some serious rejiggering but I finally got it back up and running. The Chem Twitterverse box now includes tweets from HansonFSU. For those that don't know the Chem Twitterverse box shows only the latest tweet from popular chemistry personalities. Newest on top, anything older than 24 hours is excluded.

If anyone needs easy access to their user timelines as a JSON feed, you can plug in the name of the user below.

~Mitch

By mitch • July 24, 2013 • 0 comments • Uncategorized

In defence of DHMO

Chemophobia and the use of satire such as the old DHMO joke, to tackle it seems to be the topic of the week. I'm guessing (and maybe I'm flattering myself) that my ironic piece in the Guardian, in response to the now notorious Buzzfeeds article, may have added fuel to the flames. So here's my tuppence worth.

The latest round of the chemophobia debate started with Chris Clarke's post Do you know douchbags are full of dihydrogen monoxide? Chris clearly doesn't like the use of the DHMO 'joke', as it

..mocks alleged “gullibility” in a way that dissuades the corrected from learning.

plus its as old as the hills (or glaciers), as he puts it,

I first heard the joke back in the end-1980s, back when kilometer-thick sheets of solid-phase dihydrogen monoxide occupied the Northern Hemisphere as far south as present-day Kentucky, it got old fast.

Janet Stemwedel at Doing Good Science doesn't like it either.

Really, all the target of the joke learns is that the teller of the joke has knowledge and is willing to use it to make someone else look dumb.

and she goes on to say

..there are instances where the dihydrogen monoxide joke isn't punching down but punching up, where educated people who should know better use large platforms to take advantage of the ignorant.

I deployed DHMO in the Guardian (a large platform) in an attempt to quench chemophobia and so even if Chris and Janet's comments aren't levelled directly at me, then very similar ones have. Here's my defence (and thanks to Andrew Bissette for his).
levelled directly at me, then very similar ones have. Here's my defence (and thanks to Andrew Bissette for his).

The DHMO joke (and similar) is a clear example of \textit{reductio ad absurdum}. It use makes for a powerful argument. And the fact that the joke is old serves to flag up any satire. I thought that this plus the multiple links throughout and the increasingly ludicrous statements I made should also have made it clear that my piece was satire. I hold up my hands now and admit that it may not have been obvious enough (but then \textit{even more extreme examples of satire, in the Guardian, have recently been taken seriously}).

I did not set out to punch down, up or any other which way. My aim was merely to demonstrate that through over extrapolation and application of the wrong spin any chemicals can be made to sound dangerous. I thought this was obvious. Admittedly it might not have been immediately so, that much is apparent from the comment's thread which is littered with people who were taken in but then later realised the irony. What is also apparent was that the majority of those that did not realise it was a parody DID release that the arguments I appeared to use were garbage (I received plenty of abuse from this crowd). There was also a fair amount of concern that I was punching down (although that phrase wasn't used). This criticism I take seriously. BUT after a trawl through the comments (donning my thickest skin first) there appeared to be little evidence of the punched.

In short, there were those that got it and thought it funny, or not, either way no harm done. Then there were those that didn't get the joke, but got the science, no harm done here either (except to me who had to deal with some fairly vocal trolls). And those that thought it an in-joke which did more harm than good, but I don't see much evidence of the harm.

Which all in all leaves me to conclude that we may be underestimating the intelligence of the audience. They aren't abused and ignorant, they get the science, if not the joke.

By Mark • July 16, 2013 • 2 comments • opinion, Uncategorized

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Twitter Brain’s Chemistry Novel (and other book) recommendations

I’ve been looking for an easy to read book (fiction or non-fiction) to send out to chemistry students before they arrive at Uni. The plan is to have all our first years read the same book before they arrive. With any luck it will give them something to chat about and give our first few lectures a point of reference.

So I asked the twitter brain for its chemistry book recommendations, and here’s what it came up with.

1. @andrechemist
   @Sci_ents @DrRubidium Anyone say Greg Benford’s Timescape? More physics but includes NMR, time travel, eco-disaster, and academics.

2. @rgcjk
   @Sci_ents @DrRubidium I can recommend an author… Peter Watts.. his first series is chock full of science goodness including chemistry

3. @_AACC
   @sci_ents we’re partial to this one: ht.ly/mrHGn Short stories about a deadly assassin who uses a different poison for each kill

4. @lemouton03
   @ChemistryWorld @Sci_ents My friend told me to read "The Disappearing Spoon" by Sam Kean. I just checked it out from the library!

5. @ChemistLN
   @Sci_ents I enjoyed “The Girls of Atomic City.” It tells the story of the nuclear bomb development from the “blue collar” people working...

6. @delconnor89
   @simonbayly @Sci_ents @ChemistryWorld It was Mr Levi whom inspired me onto the chemical trail at age 14. Highly recommended reading.

7. @ChemicalEyeGuy
   @BytesizeScience @Sci_ents Goethe’s “Elective Affinities” is a Classical example, but highly metaphorical. Downhill from there.

8. @joolz_mc
Mr Tompkins by George Gamow

The Periodic Table by Primo Levi isn't a novel exactly, but it is one of the best books ever.

Not sure if this counts but "cat's cradle" by Vonnegut has some nice ideas. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ice-nine](en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ice-nine)

Interesting physics and chemistry in Reflex by Dick Francis. Not exactly concepts though, more application.

not really a novel but The Periodic Kingdom by P W Atkins is a great read

The Documents in the Case, Dorothy L. Sayers. Not much chemistry until the clincher which is chemical concept. (DM for spoiler)

Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood by Oliver Sacks

Susan Gaines' Carbon Dreams?

– Napoleon's Buttons: How 17 Molecules Changed History, Penny Le Couteur

Not exactly fitting the criteria but Primo Levi's Periodic Table comes to mind

When I was undergrad, one grad inorg cume at WUSTL included question, "Who killed Missy Moonbeam in The Delta Star?"

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Susan Gaines' Carbon Dreams?
Speaking of To Many Periodic Tables...

My wife and I married 4 years ago overlooking the ocean in Palos Verdes, California. It was a very small wedding (n = 8) without a reception. A month ago, we finally got the chance to bring all our friends together for a better-late-than-never celebration in Minneapolis, Minnesota. My wife insisted we have a periodic table of cupcakes for dessert.

Two days before the party we learned that the business that was going to provide the cupcakes closed up shop. After a panicked internet search and a few telephone calls we found our last-minute, aptly named savior: Cupcake. With less than a 24-hour notice they had 120 cupcakes waiting for us to pick up.

Below are photos of the final display as well as a ‘flavor map’. The element labels/toppers were made out of colored, melted chocolate. Looking back, my only regret is that I only had two cupcakes.
Chemistry Blog. Wednesday, March 23, 2011. Yeast Beast Lab Investigation. This proves that it was not a typical chemical reaction, rather, a physical reaction because the mass was not destroyed, only transferred. Consequentially, this first experiment proved the above hypothesis as correct. As for the problem, carbon dioxide was produced, and yes, it was indeed trapped inside of the balloon. ACS Axial is a chemistry blog that offers news for chemists every day. As a service to readers, we occasionally highlight the best chemistry blogs. Best Chemistry Blogs: 5 Science Blogs Worth Bookmarking. Jesse Stanchak 3 years ago. Subscribe. ACS Axial offers new blog posts for chemists every day. But it isn't the only great blog for chemists out there. As a service to readers, we occasionally highlight the best chemistry blogs. Check out our list of the best chemistry blogs. Each blog on this list is worth a bookmark.