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# Science Communication
## Facing the Pandemic Challenge

**COMMUNICATING** risks and uncertainties is always challenging. And communicating the science and facts pertaining to such events is even more challenging. Science communication faced perhaps its biggest challenge during the past year as the SARS-CoV-2 virus rampaged through countries, infecting millions and causing widespread fatalities. More so, because it was a new, unknown virus, spreading rapidly and new information and insights about the virus were becoming available almost by the hour.

While the biggest challenge was the lack of enough and significant information pertaining to the deadly virus, ironically a surfeit of misinformation and fake information was an equally daunting challenge, at least in the initial stages of the pandemic. How did science communication get impacted by one of the deadliest pandemics to strike humanity? There have been many efforts to gauge this in the past year through several studies.

The most recent, CovidSciCom, is a study involving practitioners and experts across India, Switzerland and the United States, in collaboration with Swissnex in India and Boston, Science et Cité and the Swiss Academies in Switzerland, and the National Institute of Advanced Studies in India. The study has tried to get insights from science journalists and communicators on how the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped and impacted science reporting, both to decision-makers and the general public, and the lessons learnt.

As most earlier studies have pointed out, this study too finds that fake news and politicization are viewed as significant obstacles to efficient science communication. Which is not surprising when we consider that the WHO dubbed the pandemic as an "infodemic" and that many tech companies actively collaborated to take on the challenge of fake news.

Among the other key results is that scientists are a trusted source of information, while science journalists lag behind. The respondents' most trusted sources of information about the pandemic have been researchers, universities, and international authorities such as the WHO. While journalists were only moderately trustworthy, the least trusted sources of information are local public authorities and life science companies.

The study also finds that almost half of the responding science communicators are very active on social media, with Twitter leading (87% of regular users), followed by Facebook (58%), and LinkedIn (41%). Scientists are the least likely to use social media every day, the study found.

The pandemic unleashed a global flurry of studies and researches on the new and deadly virus generating an unprecedented amount of scientific articles. The CovidSciCom study finds that most respondents were concerned about quality control issues in COVID-19 studies, especially the dissemination of results before peer-review.

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown new challenges in almost every sphere of life. Communication could not have been left untouched. It is hoped that the lessons learnt during the past year would give new directions and inputs for transforming science communication in the years to come. Perhaps there is a need to fine-tune and extend the reach of online communication. It might also be worthwhile to improve and strengthen the synergy between communicators, scientists and authorities to generate factual and accurate information while at the same time establishing more trust among the public.

**Hasan Jawaid Khan**

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