

Abstract title

RESEARCH AND PRESS: AN (IM)POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIP?

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Abstract

The relationship between research results and press communications is very tangled, does not matter which study field one considers. In fact similar complications affect medicine, earth sciences, biology, natural sciences. This abstract concerns the earth sciences due to the frequent natural disasters that strike our planet and thus to the interest of the press towards these phenomena than other scientific aspects, for example, of biology or zoology. However similar consideration could probably apply to many other scientific topics and environments. Although results proposed by both scientists and journalists aim to inform people, they have completely different rhythms, language and operative means. The coexistence of the two sources and flows of information is certainly difficult already in everyday life but becomes almost critical right after the occurrence of a natural catastrophe.

In summary, the main differences in the way the same information is treated by the two parties are:

- the scientific result is always accompanied by the uncertainties with which it has been obtained. When interpreted by a journalist, the part of the information concerning the likely associated errors is neglected for several reasons. It is difficult to understand and especially to explain to the reader; does not match the requirement for modern news to be short and fast; apparently does not change the principal information.
- the scientific result is always susceptible of adjustments and changes. It is often very hard to know when a result is definitive in science since other data or other evidences may slightly or significantly change the conclusions. This aspect does not match the requirements for press news, that cannot be published as "preliminary"
- as a consequence, the scientific result needs time. The reasons are already summarized above: new data may be incoming, new comments or studies from colleagues working in similar fields may be available, the availability of more modern or powerful instruments may change the point of view. Again, this is incompatible with the press necessities: the information must be available as soon as possible, does not matter if it is preliminary or not precise. The concept of "good" in press often coincides with "prompt".
- the scientific results need technical language, which is indeed to be avoided in a newspaper article or a tv talk. Therefore the problem of how to render scientific concepts understandable becomes crucial.

As a conclusion, a compromise between the two groups of necessities is required. It is clear that important steps have been done from both sides in the last years: researcher are now trying to disseminate their results to a broader audience while journalists try to adopt a more technical language educating readers or spectators to enlarge their dictionary. But unfortunately it is not enough, as some examples of the presentation will show.

Presentation mode
VOLUNTEERED ORAL

Choice of session

1st OPTION U1 - GEOETHICS: Reflections on the cultural and social responsibility of the geologist in the third millennium.

2nd OPTION U6 - Spreading and popularizing earth sciences: initiatives and experiences