

Comment

JCOM — FIVE YEARS IN THE FUTURE

Developing world and science communication research

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ABSTRACT: This paper brings some reflections on JCOM and, in general on a science communication journal, from the perspective of the developing world. It is highlighted the following top aspects of JCOM: open access; the language, that is, the fact that authors can write in their own languages and the article is translated into English; and the fact that JCOM welcomes contributions from every part of the world. The author considers JCOM a unique journal, which approaches science communication in a rich way and keeping a welcome intellectual diversity.

Although practice in science communication has a history of centuries, research in the area is much younger. In the last 30 years, efforts have been putting for consolidating an international community and for creating peer-review journals specific to science communication.

Good examples are the creation in 1989 of the PCST Network, the International Network on Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST), which is a network of individuals from around the world who are active in producing and studying PCST.

From the perspective of peer-review journals, it should be highlighted the creation of *Science Communication*, in 1979, and *Public Understanding of Science*, in 1992. Eleven years ago, it was born JCOM, the *Journal of Science Communication*.

In my country, Brazil, the history of science communication research is even younger.

Illustrative of how emergent is the science communication research in Brazil is the fact that the first PhD thesis seems to be defended in 1987, according to the national database of dissertations and thesis created by Capes, an agency linked to the Ministry of Education. Since then, 359 dissertations and thesis were defended, most of them in the last decade.

A feature observed in Brazil is that, due to the fact that there are only a couple master and PhD courses on science communication, most of the dissertations and thesis are hold in other research programmes. There are also research groups in science communication throughout Brazil but usually small and emergent groups, scattered in the huge national territory.

In such context, it is very important that researchers dedicating themselves to study science communication issues can have access to an international journal such as JCOM. I was delighted when I was contacted by Nico Pitrelli, asking me what I would expect from JCOM, or more in general from a science communication journal, over the course of the next five years.

In my view, JCOM has a very key role for science communication researchers in the developing world. There are aspects of JCOM that make the journal unique and should be kept, such as:

Open access: most of the researchers from the developing world don't have access to international journals that charge fees for downloading the papers. The universities and research centers cannot afford to pay the expensive subscriptions. When they can do it, usually they need to prioritise and choose those that are more required by the national scientific community. With a such small community of science communication researchers, it is unlikely that, in any country, science communication journals are in the top list of priorities. The option taken by JCOM of being an open access journal, thus, is very important and I strongly recommend keeping as such.

The language: the main international journals in science communication are in English. This is positive since it allows communicating in a "universal" language. However, an important side effect is observed. Looking at the developing world perspective, an important percentage of people don't read English. A more difficult challenge is to write in English, and even harder is to write very good English. This means that the language is an important barrier both for reading the articles and for making part of the construction of the knowledge in the field. The decision taken by JCOM of allowing researchers to send the articles in their own language and taking care of the translation makes JCOM a top journal of science communication research for the developing world.

Voices from different worlds: JCOM welcomes contributions from every part of the world. Besides breaking the barrier language as mentioned in the previous item, the editorial team has intellectual curiosity for research and comments from people living in different cultural, social and economic context, bringing a rich diversity of the discussions. The diversity of themes, including different aspects of the relation between science and society, and of authors, both from the scientific world and other worlds, also makes JCOM an exciting stage for discussing and sharing methodologies and ideas.

In summary, in my view, JCOM is unique and some of the decisions taken when it was created made it a very important journal for thinking in science communication is a rich way and keeping a very welcome intellectual diversity.

HOW TO CITE: L. Massarani, *Developing world and science communication research*, *JCOM* 12(01) (2013) C03.