

Comment

JCOM — FIVE YEARS IN THE FUTURE

JCOM — what do I expect form a science communication journal

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ABSTRACT: The JCOM I would appreciate reading should address in real time the emerging trends and pressing issues concerning Science in society; it would be targeted not only to researchers in STS et similia, but also to the constantly expanding universe of science communication practitioners; it would make sure to avoid the hidden forms of social exclusion which are dangerously lurking behind all communication activity, including science communication.

I believe science communication is first and foremost a practice. Academic research into science communication is of course of the highest importance. But academic research has its own rules, its rigour, its validation system, etc. that are obviously different from the ones imposed on a journalist, a science explainer, a science event organiser. This is why academic research papers are not always interesting for a science communicator. On the contrary, the results of such studies, and the reflexive posture that they can generate, are of great interest for the practitioners. I would like JCOM to be a journal read as much by practitioners than by academics. More than that: a journal that every practitioner would consult when searching for new ideas, or before starting a new activity.

This implies that one of the key functions of the journal would be to identify, examine and report emerging trends and pressing issues.

JCOM should be the place where we talk about data journalism or DIY in science centres or citizen science initiatives BEFORE these issues become mainstream. Where the L'Aquila case or the links between the pope resignation and the advances in medicines are discussed RIGHT AFTER the event take place. Where the artificial uterus or the paradigmatic shift that see the choice of not knowing as an acceptable option are discussed BEFORE they become concrete realities.

In this sense, I think the role of Commentaries — thematic collection of commissioned, non-academic texts — is crucial, and should be continued and accompanied by organised online discussions. These are the spaces where the results of solid academic research and intelligent reflections on practices can meet, and possibly produce cultural novelties. Also, book reviews, as well as reviews of specific

science communication cases (festivals, new museums, news cases, etc.) should be at the core of the publication.

A second element is the link between science and other forms of culture. The JCOM I would like to read would talk about Björk's Biophilia project, The big bang theory (the series), Prometheus (argh!),... Talking about science and culture means to focus on the social relevance of an issue or a trend, rather than its belonging to a specific academic field or focus.

A third element is political. Science communication cannot be separated by crucial issues, such as the emergence of new and dangerous form of social exclusions. Science and technology being one of the main transforming agents in today's world, any form of exclusion from science is — now more than ever — a form of exclusion from society. Today, access to knowledge — and thus to science — is not equally distributed. It depends on social, economical, cultural factors. And many forms of science communication reinforce these exclusions. I would like JCOM to be the place where we can identify and analyse actions and studies on how to make science a form of empowerment instead of an instrument of exclusion.

A fourth element concerns science. Science communication analysis should concentrate on one side on what happens when science meets the public, and on the other side on how the mechanisms of knowledge production are evolving due to this meeting. The JCOM I would like to read would publish high-level papers, written in a form that a science communicator can easily understand, that can help understand what is science today.

All this is much, much harder than running an academic journal. It requires a great amount of the most energy consuming (but magically resource saving) function: intelligence. So the principal way to achieve it is to find ways to harness and organise the intelligence that is around in both the practitioners and academics communities related to science communication. The principal factor allowing this would be a mechanism involving a quite large group of people, to whom the editorial board can ask advices on emerging trends and pressing issues. A mechanism that imply investments to involve high level, ideas generating groups (something like the Leonardo's group for the Dublin's Science Gallery programs); that associate the publications with the organisation of seminars or barcamps to help identify new trends; that organise a community allowing JCOM to be always original and proactive, rather than just a paper hosting journal (as Alliage does in France).

JCOM already does a lot of the above. If it has to change (and everything must change), I think it should preserve and reinforce those four points.

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