

“It’s O.K. to abandon ship”: How to critically evaluate scientific claims before pursuing a story | Nieman Journalism Lab

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Our inboxes are full of them — press releases, pitches, and other media calling some scientific event “a breakthrough,” “a game-changer,” or “a paradigm-shifter.” Scientists, investors, and analysts flood our Twitter feeds, cheerleading a preprint or singing some company’s praises, even when there is little to no data to back up those claims.

Figuring out whether something is newsworthy can be hard. But, as science journalists, we need to examine these statements, and decide: Is this worth covering? If so, how do we do so objectively, without accidentally becoming a mouthpiece for hyperbolic claims?

What’s at stake is significant. Information comes at us like a fire hose on full blast, and [social media algorithms](#) have made it easy for lies to spread faster than truth. For example, [antithetical claims](#) have continued to try and sow doubt around the causes of climate change. And misinformation problems have only worsened during the pandemic: In a recent [Kaiser Family Foundation poll](#) on false statements about Covid-19 vaccines, researchers found that 78% of people either believed or weren’t sure about at least one of the claims. For journalists on tight deadlines, sifting fact from fiction can sometimes feel impossible.

[...]

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