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News Item

The Covid Infodemic and the Future of the Communication of Science | The Scholarly Kitchen

By Joseph DeBruin
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> The world has gotten pretty opinionated about how scientific communication should be designed, and most of what has been published has fallen into one of two camps:
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> - Camp A) The Covid crisis has torn down the walls of science and cranked the speed dial to 12. Instead of traditional journal publishing which takes months, preprints are exploding, "a global collaboration unlike any in history" is happening in real-time, and an old system is finally getting the overhaul it needed!
> - Camp B) We are seeing the first true social "infodemic." Misinformation is everywhere, most of what is out there "isn't even science," and governments are cracking down on social media platforms and scientific publishers to dramatically limit the content that makes it online.
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> Both of these camps are at least partially correct, but few articles address the fact that speed and uncertainty in science are often two sides of the same coin, and getting the benefit of speed without the risk of uncertainty is extremely challenging. To be sure, focusing as a journalist entirely on the benefit of speed or the damage of misinformation likely reflects a desire to keep an article clean and to the point. Nonetheless it's important to note that peer review with sequential disclosure, the system that has historically mitigated risk from uncertainty, is exactly the system that is being upended in order to increase the speed of innovation. So although it's complex, we owe it to science to dig in this rocky middle ground, and to ask the question of how new technologies and insights can allow us to maintain the benefit of established truth-seeking systems while continuing to push the boundaries of speed.
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