

## **Pandemic posing new challenges for science communication**

**The pandemic has been redefining science communication and science journalism. The study titled "CovidSciCom - The Impact of Covid-19 on Science Communication", which was carried out in Switzerland, India and the USA, provides an insight into how Covid-19 influences the communication of scientific knowledge.**

What kind of challenges does the pandemic and subsequent infodemic pose for science communication? How do science communicators and journalists assess the fear of a possible loss of quality and trust in scientific reporting? A study titled "CovidSciCom - The Impact of Covid-19 on Science Communication" posed similar questions to 165 scientists, science journalists and science communicators in Switzerland, India and the USA, and provides an insight into how Covid-19 influences the communication of scientific knowledge. The results of the survey are available from today on the website [www.covidscicom.org](http://www.covidscicom.org).

CovidSciCom is an initiative of Swissnex (in India and Boston) in close partnership with the National Institute of Advanced Studies NIAS (Bangalore), the Swiss Academies of Sciences, and the Swiss foundation Science & Cité. "Good science communication creates trust - trust in people's ability to drive positive change" explains Sebastien Hug, CEO of Swissnex in India. "The pandemic has dramatically increased the need for good science communication. At the same time, it has questioned certain seemingly established norms of science communication and presented them with great challenges, with a flood of information that has never been seen before. Our survey provides analytical insights and personal stories into the work of science communicators since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis."

### **Strong trust in scientists and the WHO**

The survey participants - across all professions - testify to their strong confidence in researchers and in international health organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO). Interestingly, science journalists were not able to get such an acceptance even amongst their peers. This tendency was similar in all three countries. Other studies in [Germany](#) and the [USA](#) have already confirmed this skepticism towards the communication of scientific results through the media. The least credible sources of information for science communicators are local authorities, the pharmaceutical industry and, by far, social media influencers.

## **The biggest challenges: disinformation and politicization**

Not surprisingly, science communicators from all three countries agree that disinformation about Covid-19 and politicization hinder effective science communication. Fake news is widely recognized as a major challenge for society today. The science communicators fear that science is increasingly being instrumentalized for political purposes. The survey shows that such a development is considered to be most problematic in the USA, where the pandemic and the presidential elections have provoked an unprecedented polarization in society.

## **Quality of scientific publications questioned**

The pandemic has resulted in a rush of scientific publications on Covid-19. The urgency of the situation has demanded a rapid acceleration of the publication process, based on scientific output which has not undergone adequate peer reviews, such as preprints. This development is often viewed as damaging to the quality and credibility of the scientific information disseminated by the communicators, which is also reflected in our survey. Journalists and scientists in particular express their concerns about this tendency. In addition, the survey participants in all three countries - especially in India - agree, that the utilisation of the tools and techniques of humanities and social sciences (e.g. on the social, psychological or cultural effects of the pandemic) will be useful in enhancing the quality of reporting science to the public in the post Covid-19 world.

## **[covidscicom.org](https://www.covidscicom.org) - Personal stories from science communicators**

The project "CovidSciCom - The Impact of Covid-19 on Science Communication" highlights on the website [www.covidscicom.org](https://www.covidscicom.org) not only the results of our research but also interviews and podcasts with personal stories from scientists, science communicators and journalists who have dealt with the topic. The website also provides the dataset of the study conducted by the team individual evaluations, as well as a compilation of relevant articles and reports from all three countries.

The insights from the project and expert perspectives on the same will also be a point of discussion in a virtual panel scheduled 24th March in India. For details, visit [www.swissnexindia.org](https://www.swissnexindia.org).

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