

Boosting impact and citations: Why talking to journalists might actually be a good idea

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Publications and citations are the main currency of an academic career. So when there is too little time already, why take time away from doing research and writing scientific papers to do media work and outreach, a busy scientist may ask. Well, for one, thing, to boost ones citations.

The oral presentation gives an overview of findings from a number of studies that show how researchers are more likely to cite papers that have been publicized in the popular press, making news media a relevant platform for scientists to showcase their work to their peers as well. The results have interesting implications both for researchers wanting to boost their citations and for communications specialists on the lookout for 'proof' that what they are doing really matters and has a direct impact.

One such study of how popular coverage of (medical) research has amplified the effects of that research on the scientific community focuses on scientific articles from the scientific journal The New England Journal of Medicine, that were written about by the New York Times. The articles that were mentioned in the newspaper received a disproportionate number of scientific citations in each of the 10 years after the articles appeared. In the first year alone, the articles received 72.8 percent more scientific citations compared to control articles.

The beauty of the study is that it has a control group, thus making it possible to rule out that the articles were merely cited more because the journalists chose to write about the most interesting scientific papers: During a 12 week strike at the New York Times an 'edition of record' of the newspaper was made, but not distributed. And interestingly enough, the effect on citations was not present for articles published during the strike.

And the effect does not apply only to media coverage by American newspapers. For instance a study of papers from PNAS (2008 and 2009) covered in Italian and English newspapers reveals that coverage in British paper led to an increase in citations by 63% and coverage in an Italian paper led to a 16% increase. However, at the same time citations among Italian scientists increased significantly, so national media in non-English speaking countries can be very efficient for connecting with a national community of researchers.

In recent years social media have entered the scene, and recent studies indicate that being mentioned on Twitter might further amplify the impact of having interactions with reporters.

References

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