

Recent Journal Publication Challenges and Opportunities due to COVID

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- Clearly COVID has introduced some new challenges and realities in journal publications.
- The pace of scientific publishing especially in the areas of health sciences accelerated dramatically.
- In that regard time from submission to publication has sped up substantially and at the same time many papers were uploaded to open-access preprint servers without undergoing the normal peer-review process.
- As a result, mistakes with potentially serious and consequential outcomes were made.

- The publication *Retraction Watch* has been [tracking notices of retractions and expressions of concern](#) about COVID-19-related research and there were many.
- Serge Horbach, a postdoctoral researcher and sociologist of science at Radboud University, in the Netherlands, [found that medical journals halved their time to publication](#) for COVID-19 articles.
- "While the acceleration of journals' publication process is laudable from the perspective of quick information dissemination, it also raises concerns relating to the quality of the peer review process and the quality of the resulting publications," Horbach wrote.

- Two issues are raised in this process: The speed of publication and the broad use of preprint servers to disseminate research quickly prior to peer review. The former points to the lack of a proper and meticulous peer review process, while the second one to its complete absence.
- So there seems to be a dilemma in the evolving world of a pandemic in the following trade off:
- On the one hand the traditional model: A paper is submitted to the journal after all the work is done and then submitted to the journal which sends it to a couple of referees who take their time, typically six months and more and if one is lucky and there are not major issues the paper may be accepted and then published down the road.

- On the other hand, the other extreme publishing model under the pressure of a quick publication under COVID is where scientists upload their work to a preprint server, without significant peer review, making possibly striking claims about what their work shows which is then reported by the media without any prior quality control of the evidence.
- In social sciences and economics in particular the same trade-off exists between rapid publication and thorough peer review.
- One type of model in that regard is *A new project, the Covid-19 and Academic Productivity in Economic Research* ([CAPER](#)).
- Purpose is to quantify the effects of the pandemic containment measures on economists' research productivity by gender and seniority.

- Another model is the emergence of a recent journal has appeared attempting to fill the gap: Covid Economics.
- *Covid Economics, Vetted and Real-Time Papers*, started in h 2020, as an on online publication platform.
- The purpose is quick dissemination of scholarly work on the Covid-19 epidemic based on explicit theory and/or empirical evidence.
- Other platforms have been VoxEU, which presents short analyses on the epidemic and other economic issues.

- The model adopted by Covid Economics is based on vetting and **not** standard peer review:
- The idea is to allow for research to be published in real time: The submissions are evaluated swiftly, within five days, and appear almost immediately online a few days later.
- The vetting is done by Editors for quality and relevance, where vetting is different from refereeing in the sense that the decision is up or down (with no revising and resubmitting option).
- The articles are pre-prints: Authors, who retain copyright, may later submit to established reviews and the platform has links with established journals that will accept revised versions of papers featured in *Covid Economics*.

- The above trade-off between speed and thorough peer review has always been at the center of the publication process:

Need to balance the two opposing forces:

How to do that:

- (1) Keep the special issues as an important venue: They give focus and they add on topic relevance and importance.
- (2) Add incentives to contributors with partial or full publication fee waivers to attract the best possible authors.
- (3) Give incentives to reviewers based on speed and quality of review
- (4) Perhaps also allow for research to be published in real time for the submissions for shorter papers to be a simple up or down. This would be somewhere in-between having the pre-print model of *Covid Economics* and the more traditional full-fledged peer review process.

These are things are already in place and I think they will go a long way addressing the problems that Covid has exposed in the publication process (even though it was there but perhaps not as prominently exposed).