

Visible scientists during COVID-19: how and why the pandemic turned some scientists into celebrities

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the mass media focused intensely on science and health, calling on scientists for information, guidance and reassurance. As a result, many scientists surged to public prominence and became household names.

In this research project, we applied indicators of media visibility of science drawn from scientific literature (including indicators of scientists who achieve celebrity status) to identify the most visible scientist that emerged during COVID-19 across 16 countries during 2020 – year one of the pandemic. The countries and visible scientists are listed in Table 1. We can already report that their average age on 1 January 2020 was 58 years old and that the male/female ratio is 13:3 (81% male).

In the next phase of the research, we developed a comprehensive template to describe each of the visible scientists and their rise to media stardom during the pandemic. In addition to demographic information, we gathered information about visibility triggers during the pandemic trajectory; indicators of scientific credibility and reputation; information about the scientists' public image and persona; as well as his/her communication style and media interactions. Furthermore, we looked for any evidence that these scientists were involved in public controversies or experienced ideological tensions during the pandemic; the blurring of their professional and private lives in the mass media, and whether they became tradable commodities. The final phase of the project will involve a comparative analysis of these science media stars of the Covid-19 pandemic.

16 countries : Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, India, Unites States, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

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