Problem owner name
Michael Imelfort

Problem title
A/B stract (a.k.a Bananas cure cancer [they don't])

What is the problem you want to solve?

Researchers value facts and spend a lot of time and effort making sure that when they publish their work they accurately describe the results they've obtained and how they obtained them. Various checks are built into the system to ensure this happens including peer review, pre-publication and collaboration, yet too often research is inaccurately portrayed as a silver bullet for some important issue, as a proof of something unrelated (and perhaps also untrue), or as focusing on something frivolous, wasteful or unnecessary. To help solve this issue some publications and institutions encourage or require a media release to be submitted alongside the research, however there is currently no efficient way for researchers to predict how that release could potentially be presented and / or interpreted in public spaces and the media (both traditional and social).

I want to help researchers get better at predicting how their research will be viewed.

Why do you want to solve this problem?

As a society we rely on scientifically derived knowledge to make decisions about almost every aspect of our lives including many important matters of life or death. So it's important that the public in general are able to accurately interpret certain scientific results. Researchers typically communicate their results using scientific language that's targeted largely to other researchers in their field, however most people are not working researchers and most researchers will likely work in an unrelated field. In truth, almost everybody significantly relies on interpretations of scientific results that are passed along by others including friends, colleagues, teachers and the media. If the research has been misrepresented it can have dire consequences.

What do you envision as the ideal solution for this problem?

I'm open to suggestions on how to go about solving the issue. I've been thinking about a system where researchers can create several versions of their media releases and an accompanying questionnaire about the research itself. People from various backgrounds would be asked to read a version of the release and answer the questionnaire without reading the paper itself. Their responses would help the researcher to understand how their media release could be interpreted so they can make changes and perhaps re-test before releasing the final version.

What sort of Open Source solution do you think can be created in 48 hours, by a small team of developers, designers and data analysts?

I think there are enough apps around (Google docs, survey apps, etc) that it would be possible to quickly put together a version of the solution without requiring servers or serious programming skills however I'm open to suggestions here too.

Are there datasets or people with domain knowledge that you will be bringing to work with? What/who are they?

There's no special data that's needed to make the project happen

What are the current solutions for handling this problem?

Currently researchers can use multiple tools to share their work with colleagues or friends before release but I don't know of any solution that allows researchers to gather specific feedback from larger groups of people including people they don't know..

Summary for website

PROBLEM

As a society we rely on scientifically derived knowledge to make decisions about almost every aspect of our lives including many important matters of life or death. So it's important that the public in general are able to accurately interpret certain scientific results. Researchers value facts and spend a lot of time and effort making sure that when they publish their work they accurately describe the results they've obtained and how they obtained them. They typically communicate their results using scientific language that's targeted largely to other researchers in their field, however most people are not researchers and most researchers will likely work in an unrelated field. In truth, almost everybody significantly relies on interpretations of scientific results that are passed along by others including friends, colleagues, teachers and the media. If the research has been misrepresented it can have dire consequences.

To make their work more accessible some publications and institutions encourage or require a media release to be submitted alongside the research, however there is currently no efficient way for researchers to predict how that release could potentially be presented and / or interpreted in public spaces and the media (both traditional and social).

I want to help researchers get better at predicting how their research will be viewed which I hope will improve scientific literacy amongst the general public.