

# Level of media coverage for scientific research linked to number of citations

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An analysis of over 800 academic research papers on physical health and exercise suggests that the level of popular media coverage for a given paper is strongly linked to the attention it receives within the scientific

community. P. Sage Anderson and colleagues at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, report these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on July 1, 2020.

Popular media sources, such as mainstream news and [social media](#), often discuss [scientific findings](#) originally reported in peer-reviewed papers published by academic journals. The scientific impact of a paper is usually judged according to the number of times it is cited by other peer-reviewed papers. However, the relationship between the scientific impact of a paper and its level of coverage in popular media is unclear.

Anderson and colleagues evaluated 818 peer-reviewed papers published in 2007 or 2008 that reported original research findings on various aspects of [physical health](#) and exercise. They examined the relationship between the amount of popular media attention given to each paper and the number of citations it received. They also accounted—as much as possible—for the reputations of the papers' authors and of the journals in which the papers were published.

The analysis revealed a robust association between the amount of popular media coverage of a given paper and the number of times it was cited—papers which received more media attention also tended to be more highly cited. Whether one causes the other is unclear; the media may be picking up on which papers have the most scientific impact, or media attention might influence the likelihood of a paper to be cited by subsequent papers, or a third factor might drive both media attention and citations.

Further research is needed to clarify the relationship between popular media coverage and scientific impact. Nonetheless, these findings could help inform [research institutions](#) and other organizations that place importance on scientific impact. They could also provide new insights for scientists who use the media to communicate with their peers and the

public about their research.

The authors add: "Results from this study confirm the idea that media attention given to scientific research is strongly related to scientific citations for that same research. These results can inform scientists who are considering using [popular media](#) to increase awareness concerning their work, both within and outside the [scientific community](#)."

**More information:** Anderson PS, Odom AR, Gray HM, Jones JB, Christensen WF, Hollingshead T, et al. (2020) A case study exploring associations between popular media attention of scientific research and scientific citations. *PLoS ONE* 15(7): e0234912.

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