Science at the Scale of Human Experience

Science and storytelling mean different things when they speak of truth. This difference leads many to blame storytelling for presenting a distorted view of science and contributing to misinformation. Yet others celebrate storytelling as a way to engage audiences and share accurate scientific information. I will disentangle the complexities of how storytelling intersects with the understanding of science. Storytelling is the act of sharing a narrative, and science and narrative represent two distinct ways of constructing reality. Where science searches for broad patterns that capture general truths about the world, narratives search for connections through human experience that assign meaning and value to reality. Reviewing literature across communication, psychology and science education, I explore how these contrasting conceptions of truth manifest across different contexts to either promote or counter the understanding of science. I also identify gaps in the literature and identify promising future areas of research. Even with their differences, the underlying purpose of both science and narrative seek to make sense of the world and find our place within it. While narrative can indeed lead to scientific misinformation, narrative can also help science counter misinformation by providing meaning to reality that incorporates accurate science knowledge into human experience.