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From nanoplastics to technology-critical elements: global contaminants or media buzz?

The strong competition for funding has led to giving preference to subjects that can retain large media coverage. At present, all universities and research centres have a service of press releases and we are all encouraged to use intensively social media. We have shifted from “Publish or perish” to “Be on social media or perish”. This has led to the increase and fast turnover of ‘fashion’ research subjects in some fields, such as in environmental sciences. This is probably unavoidable but it should never be based on overselling and it has not to be at the price of lack of methodological rigorousness.

Two cases will be discussed in depth in this communication: microplastics and technology critical elements. Are they emerging contaminants? Are we applying the best approaches to their study? Both require interdisciplinary skills and are beautiful subjects where to apply our already long experience in aquatic chemistry and colloidal sciences, acquired over years of work on global problems such as lead or mercury pollution.