

# Swipe right for science: Papr app is ‘Tinder for preprints’

App lets researchers rate life-sciences abstracts by swiping across a screen.

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Getty

Swipe to like: Papr borrows its rating scheme from the dating app Tinder.

Inspired by the dating app Tinder, which asks users to ‘swipe right’ across their screens to approve prospective matches, an app called Papr is inviting scientists to swipe to rate life-sciences preprints. And like other recommendation algorithms, Papr also promises to learn from researchers’ choices so that it can supply them with preprints they’ll like.

“It’s relatively simple, but it seems to work pretty well,” says Nick Strayer, a PhD student in biostatistics at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. He and fellow Vanderbilt biostatistician Lucy D’Agostino McGowan added the swipe function and the recommender engine to Papr after a simpler version of the app was launched in October 2016 by Jeff Leek, a biostatistician at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland.

The swipe functionality makes Papr “way more interesting”, says Leek in a blogpost. Users see abstracts from bioRxiv preprints, and can swipe their screens in four directions to rate them: right if the manuscript seems ‘exciting and probable’; up for ‘exciting and questionable’, down for ‘boring and probable’ and left for ‘boring and questionable’. (On a desktop, users drag with their mouse.)

Papr can also suggest connections with scientists who like the same preprints, by linking to their Twitter accounts — which could help scientists to meet new collaborators, says Strayer. So far, around 150 people have signed in to use the app, although many more are doing so anonymously, adds McGowan.

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Papr could collect interesting data, Strayer says. He and McGowan are thinking about releasing a leaderboard of the most popular papers, and also throwing preprints from the ArXiv physical-sciences server into the mix. Another idea is to allow users to click through from the app to read the full article, or even to use the app to identify hot topics in research.

McGowan and Strayer have both been invited to work with Leek in his lab, but for now, they say, they are concentrating on their theses, and see Papr as a side-project. And Leek isn’t taking Papr too seriously, either. “This app is provided solely for entertainment of the scientific community and may be taken down at any time with no notice because Jeff gets tired of it,” adds a note on the app’s website.

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