



# Communicating your research to the media: a guide for researchers

Part 1: Choosing whether to engage with the media



Guidance, developments, news and ideas for Taylor & Francis authors



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# Why choose to engage with the media?

Communicating your research to the media can be a highly effective method of increasing the impact your article has not only within your field of research, but to the widest possible audience: the general public. However, such high profile communication is not always straightforward and can be a time-consuming challenge, particularly if it something you feel less experienced in.

There are many sources of advice and guidance available for researchers interested in engaging with the media, from charities and independent organisations, through to university press offices. We have brought together some of the best expert guidance on offer, together with advice and tips from fellow researchers based on their experiences of communicating with the media.



# Why is it beneficial to communicate your research to the media?



“ In this post-truth era, providing journalists with trusted quality science content is vital to having informed public debates on issues that impact us all. ”

Lyndal Byford, CEO, Australian Science Media Centre



## It benefits society

“ For the benefit of society’s ability to make wise decisions and for the benefit of the academy’s ability to remain relevant, the academic community needs to accept its role in public engagement. ”

Andrew J. Hoffman, ‘Reflections: Academia’s Emerging Crisis of Relevance and the Consequent Role of the Engaged Scholar’, *Journal of Change Management* (2016)

## It informs policy

“ Many political decisions and news are based on scientific evidence. The scientific information needs to be simplified in order to be understood by policy makers and the wider audience, sometimes leading to mistakes. For this reason, **it is important that researchers care about how they communicate science** and how their evidence is used by policy makers and journalists. ”

David Docquier, Postdoctoral Researcher in Climate Sciences

## A press campaign success story

At Taylor & Francis, we've seen articles suddenly jump to several thousand downloads after media coverage. In an age where researchers are often required to demonstrate the impact of their work, this matters. Engaging with the media (when done appropriately) can be a way of driving usage, attention and impact, and in turn help you to develop your career as a researcher.

"We recently distributed a press release in support of a recent article on the use of wearable fitness trackers in schools. We worked closely with the Education Media Centre, as well as the authors of the article, to target national and international media outlets with the release. The article was picked up by Sky News - who ran a report and live TV



debate on the use of fitness trackers - and The Conversation. Alongside the authors' efforts on Twitter, where they re-tweeted links to the media coverage, this helped to bring significant attention to their study. The Altmetric score has since risen to over 120, with almost 1,300 views of the original paper."

**Daniel Pullin**, Press & Media Relations Executive, Taylor & Francis

"Engaging with the media was hugely beneficial for developing the reach and potential impact of our research to a public audience, whether in print, online, or on television. The speed at which the media responded to requests for information was quite unexpected, and translating research papers into everyday language can be challenging. But working closely with media teams proved very useful in giving me the confidence to communicate with authority."

**Dr Victoria Goodman**, University of Birmingham; co-author of the article

Read the full press release: [bit.ly/tf-fitbit](https://bit.ly/tf-fitbit)

## It encourages accurate reporting

“If you don't put yourself forward to the media you can't influence what they write. If you are leaving journalists, who don't understand the work nearly as well as you, to write stories from press releases and impenetrable papers in journals without making yourself available to explain it, then you pretty much lose the right to complain about being misrepresented.”

**Mark Henderson**, Head of Communications, the Wellcome Trust, quoted in *Standing up for Science: A guide to the media for early career scientists*, Sense about Science (2006)



## It connects public communities

“Some claim that public engagement enriches the research process. Others see public engagement as helping academics to become better teachers. It’s also generally recognised as **a bridge between the university and the outside world** and a way for academics to talk to and become more visible in their public communities.”

**Richard Watermeyer & Jamie Lewis**, In ‘Why universities and academics should bother with public engagement’.  
*The Conversation* (2017)

THE CONVERSATION

## It raises awareness

“Good evidence should ultimately help to promote good policy and good practice – otherwise, what is it for? You can produce excellent research with profound and important findings – but if the only people who know about it are other experts in your own field, important practical applications are likely to be missed.”

**Fran Abrams**, Joint CEO, Education Media Centre



## It can inspire future generations

“Engaging with the media is one of the most effective methods to reach the public ... It helps to provide the public and decision makers with information about the latest scientific discoveries or emerging health concerns, particularly where there may be ethical or societal issues at stake. **Engaging with the media can convey the wonder of research** and the crucial role of science in society. It may even inspire the next generation.”

From ‘How to Work with the Media’, published by the Wellcome Trust



# Framing your research to gain the best impact

It's worth spending time thinking carefully about your article title and abstract to make sure you frame your research in the right way. If represented well, the title and abstract can be an effective tool to capture the attention of media representatives and peers to drive impact. At the same time, it is important to make sure they accurately represent your findings. So how to get them right? Here are a few pointers on what to consider.

## It benefits society

“ If you look at titles, shorter, snappier, eye-catching titles generally are more receptive and more engaging to more readers, particularly in the online age of social media. ”

**Dr John Harrison**, Associate Editor,  
Regional Studies

## Titles

- Your title is your headline - make it concise, accurate, and informative.
- You want your article to come up in search engine results, so try to include keywords that readers might be searching for.
- Avoid using “Investigation of ...”; “Study of ...”; “More about ...”; “... revisited”. If readers don't have an interest in X, they may not take the time to read the rest of your paper.

## Abstracts

- In this short paragraph, you should create a selling pitch, focusing on what your research is about, what methods have been used, and what you found out.
- Make sure your abstract includes an answer to the question “so what?” – the implications of your research for policy, practice or understanding is something journalists will be interested in when identifying news stories to cover.
- Don't exaggerate the research. Whatever you argue or claim in the abstract must reflect what is in the main body of your article – there's no room for hyperbole here.
- Ensure that the abstract is self-contained, without abbreviations, footnotes, or incomplete references. It needs to make sense on its own.
- Again, keywords, keywords, keywords. Think about your article and how someone might find it. What search terms might they use?



# Should you ever choose not to engage with the media?



## Be prepared

“ Prepare the key messages you want to communicate in advance. **Think about the audience, and make sure that you are expressing these key messages in a way which is accessible.** A helpful thing to do is to think of a real-world example which is relevant and will help them understand how your research links to their own lives. Interviewers often want to take a discussion in their own direction so beware of being side-tracked and be ready to say something along the lines of ‘Yes but, the really important thing here is...’ and get back to your key messages. ”

**Professor Debra Myhill**, University of Exeter, UK

## Going public and defending research

“ When an issue is controversial it can be tempting for scientists to avoid the media altogether because they fear being misunderstood, or find it too hard to get their points across. But **if public understanding of science is to improve, it is important for researchers to be part of the conversation.** The key to preparing for confronting media interviews is to understand the underlying issues and how the media works. ”

**Science Media Savvy website**, Australian Science Media Centre



## Don't allow yourself to be silenced

“ Researchers being targeted often shy away from doing media work as they are concerned that this will attract more criticism. Our extensive experience in this area suggests that **doing media work does not increase the chance of a researcher being targeted.** And if you stop engaging with the media you may struggle to reach out to the wider public, thereby creating a vacuum of information that those critical of your research can exploit. ”

**Science Media Centre**





## Feeling inspired? Find out more...

### Nominate your Taylor & Francis article

If you are soon to publish an article in a Taylor & Francis journal and you think it will be of interest to a wider audience, send us a press campaign nomination. The journals press team will work with you to decide the best approach to highlight your research, crafting a tailored campaign which can secure valuable impact for your article.

**bit.ly/pressnomination**

- Contact the Taylor & Francis journals press team at [newsroom@taylorandfrancis.com](mailto:newsroom@taylorandfrancis.com)
- Browse recent press releases at [www.newsroom.taylorandfrancisgroup.com](http://www.newsroom.taylorandfrancisgroup.com)

**Many thanks to all who granted permission for their valuable advice to be shared in this guide. Find out more about the contributing organisations by visiting their websites below.**



**Australian Science Media Centre** is an independent, not-for-profit service for the news media. It aims to increase the quantity and accuracy of science reporting and public understanding of science.

[www.smc.org.au](http://www.smc.org.au)



**Sense About Science** is an independent charity that challenges misrepresentation of science and evidence in public life. The offer guidance and advice on all aspects of research communication to the public through their many events and publications.

[www.senseaboutscience.org](http://www.senseaboutscience.org)



The UK-based **Science Media Centre** provides, for the benefit of the public and policymakers, accurate and evidence-based information about science and engineering through the media, particularly on controversial and headline news stories when most confusion and misinformation occurs.

[www.sciencemediacentre.org](http://www.sciencemediacentre.org)



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[www.wellcome.ac.uk](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk)



The **Education Media Centre** is an independent charity set up to improve the public and media understanding of education research and evidence.

[www.educationmediacentre.org](http://www.educationmediacentre.org)

### THE CONVERSATION

**The Conversation** is an independent source of news and views from the academic and research community, delivered direct to the public. [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)