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EXPLORING SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

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Exploring Science Communication

Psychological science offers rich insights into human behaviour, yet its value depends on how well we communicate these insights beyond academic circles. We may produce rigorous studies, careful analyses and meaningful findings, but if the message is unclear or the data is poorly presented, the knowledge remains unused. Good work ends up in cold storage, and the communities who could benefit never see its impact.

This issue of Singapore Psychologist explores why communication is as important as discovery. When we choose a chart, craft a headline or frame a statistic, we are shaping how people understand the world. Clear and honest communication strengthens trust and helps people make informed decisions. It also reflects one of the core purposes of psychological science, which is not only to determine what works, but to guide real-life application and improve lives.

Issue 22 brings together thoughtful pieces on how data can be misunderstood, how uncertainty can be conveyed responsibly and how we can guard against the subtle temptations to oversimplify or overstate. These reflections remind us that communication is not an afterthought. It is central to our identity as psychologists and to the impact of our work in society.

I hope this issue encourages us to continue refining how we translate evidence into practice so that the science we build reaches the people it is meant to serve.

Dr Pearlene Ng
Vice President (Outreach)



EDITOR'S NOTE

"42.3% of what, exactly?" In a world increasingly driven by data, the way we communicate science—especially psychology—has never been more important, or more prone to misinterpretation. From chart manipulation to selectively framed statistics, subtle shifts in presentation can change not just *how* people understand data, but *what* they believe to be true. And when it comes to mental health, behaviour, and the human condition, these choices have real consequences.

In our current issue, we bring together perspectives of writers from diverse backgrounds, who collectively clarify important points about science communication. From explaining how data storytelling influences public trust in psychology, to examining ethical dilemmas in visualising research findings and how researchers might communicate uncertainty without undermining credibility, our contributors share examples of science communication gone right—or wrong. Some even share their reflections on personal experiences, either as a professional science communicator or as a student of psychology.

Together, they help us understand how psychologists, psychology students, and we as public consumers of science communication, can become not just better communicators, but more responsible interpreters of data in an age of information overload. Read on to explore.

Dr Denise Dillon
Editor-in-Chief

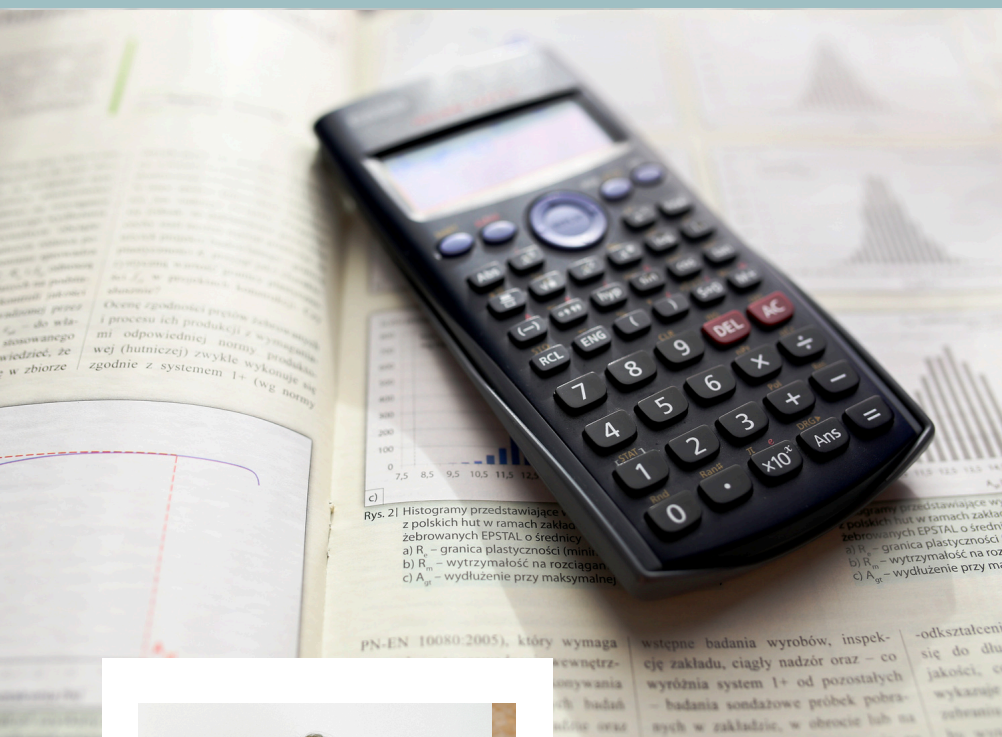
Stats Don't Speak for Themselves

By Ms. Shamini Ganasarajah

Researchers know better than most that humans don't make decisions based on numbers alone. Yet when it comes to presenting our own research, we often expect **statistics** to do all the talking. The truth is, numbers are only half the story. Left on their own, they can feel cold, confusing, or even meaningless. What makes them persuasive is the way we frame them—the story that connects the data to real life.



I've seen this play out again and again in my own work in research and insights. When I'm presenting data to executives, advertisers, or the general public, it's not enough to show the numbers. I have to answer two questions right away: **So what? and What's in it for me?** Those are the only things people really want to know.



Why Numbers Alone Don't Move People

Think about the early days of COVID. Every day, infection numbers filled the news. But it wasn't the raw case counts that changed behaviour, it was the framing. **"Cases doubling**

every three days” made people sit up and pay attention. **“5% rise”** didn’t land the same way, even though both were true. Psychologists showed decades ago that framing effects change the way we interpret identical information (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984).



That’s because we’re wired to respond to stories and patterns, not digits. A statistic like “38% of respondents reported improvement” means little in isolation. Improvement compared to what? Is that high or low? Without context, people either gloss over the effect or interpret it however they want (Dahlstrom, 2014; Gottschall, 2012).

Clear, Accessible, Credible

In **public health and social research** especially, the way we communicate findings matters. Research can influence whether someone seeks treatment, how companies set policies, or how social stigma is reinforced or reduced. That’s a heavy responsibility. Accessibility

doesn't mean dumbing things down, it means making findings clear. Compare these two statements:

- "A randomized controlled trial found significant improvements in GAD-7 scores ($p < .05$)."
- **"People who went through therapy felt meaningfully less anxious within three months."**

Both are true. Only one is likely to stick. Studies on health communication show that clarity and transparency make people more likely to understand and trust medical statistics (Gigerenzer et al., 2007).



But clarity doesn't mean we gloss over complexity. Oversimplifying is risky because it can turn into hype, and hype erodes trust fast. We've all seen what happens when catchy psychological soundbites like **"power pose boosts confidence"** get overstated. The backlash is worse than if the nuance had been communicated in the first place. Accessibility is about providing a clear window to a complex landscape; it is not about flattening the mountain into a molehill.



Lessons I've Borrowed from Media and Marketing

In media and marketing, nobody has the patience for stats without a story. That's where I picked up two tools that I now apply to **research communication** across any discipline:



The "So What?" Test

Every number should answer why it matters. For example: **"60% of respondents meditate weekly"** is nice, but so what? Add: **"This shows mindfulness has moved from niche to mainstream in Singapore, creating a massive opportunity for wellness providers."** Now it lands.



The WIIFM Test (What's In It For Me?)

People care when they see themselves in the data. If I tell an advertiser that **"viewers are more attentive on streaming,"** that's interesting. But if I tell them, **"Your ad dollars go further because audiences actually watch and remember,"** now it's relevant. Research findings work the same way. Show people what the research means for their lives, not just the p-value.



This is exactly what practitioners in “data storytelling” emphasise: numbers need narrative and visuals to drive change (Dykes, 2019).

How Framing Builds or Breaks Trust

The same dataset can tell very different stories depending on how you frame it. Take adolescent screen time. One headline could scream: **“Screen use linked to depression in teens.”** Another could say: **“Most teens are fine, but heavy daily screen use is linked to higher depression risk.”**

Both are technically accurate. The second one is more trustworthy because it keeps the nuance intact. For parents, educators, and policymakers, that distinction matters (Escalas, 2007; Green, Strange & Brock, 2002).

And in Singapore, where public attitudes toward social issues are still evolving, how we frame these messages is especially important. Every headline about a social phenomenon is a public education moment. Fear-based framing can reinforce stigma. Transparent, balanced framing can build the trust necessary to reduce it (Subramaniam et al., 2017).



Practical Tips for Turning Data Into Story

So how do we get this right in practice? A few things I've found useful:



Start with your audience. Ask: who am I talking to, and what do they care about? A policymaker, a student, and a working parent will need different angles on the same stat.



Use visuals that clarify, not confuse. A clean, well-labelled chart beats a dense regression table every time.



Pair numbers with people. “1 in 4 adults experiences anxiety” feels real when you share a vignette of a working mum balancing job stress and caregiving.



Be upfront about limits. Saying “this was a small, exploratory study” doesn’t weaken your story, it makes it more trustworthy.



Test the story. If someone outside your field can explain back the key finding, you’ve nailed it.



Why This Matters

Data storytelling isn't fluff — it's the application of evidence-based communication. We know people make sense of the world through narratives, not spreadsheets. If we want research to shape public opinion, policy, or personal behaviour, we have to package it in a way that people can engage with and believe.



Done well, data storytelling makes **research findings** accessible and useful. Done poorly, it risks confusing people or eroding trust. That's why the responsibility lies with us, as researchers and practitioners, to get the balance right: clear but not simplistic, compelling but not exaggerated.

Numbers will never speak for themselves. But when we give them a story—one that answers so what? and what's in it for me?—we are not just sharing data; we are **bridging the gap between the lab and the life lived**. That is when statistics truly gain their power.



Making Sense of Numbers, Statistics, and Probabilities

*By Ms. Karyen Chai, PhD student,
Murdoch University*

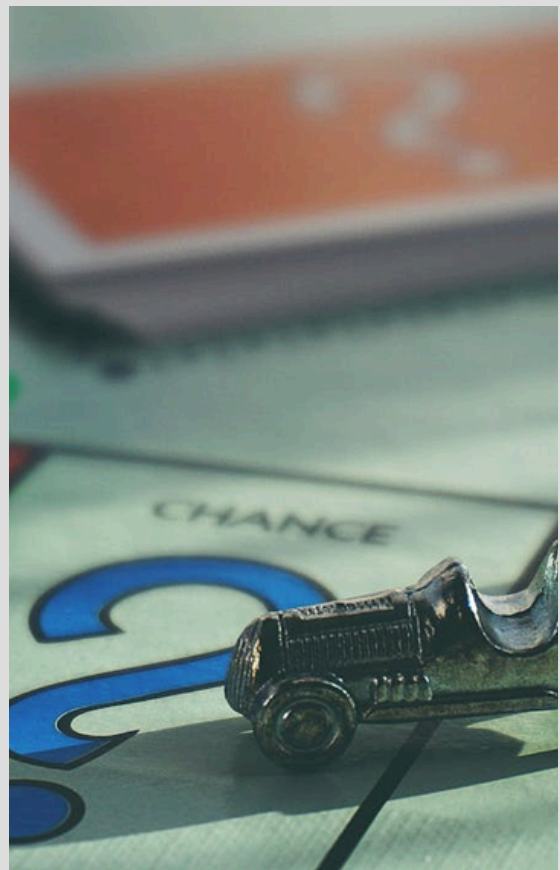
We are surrounded by numbers — from calories on a menu to the probability of rain, to statistics in health news and research papers. Yet, our relationship with numbers isn't always logical. Many of us think of numbers as precise and objective, but how we interpret them is shaped by language, framing, and cognitive biases.

In science communication — whether in psychology, health, or education — numbers often carry the weight of truth. But a “statistically significant result” or “double



the effect” doesn’t always mean what we think it does. Misunderstandings can ripple into public decisions, treatment choices, and policy design.

In this article, we explore common misconceptions that affect how people interpret data, and how both professionals and readers can communicate — and understand — statistics more clearly.



Common Misconceptions & Biases

1. Significance ≠ importance

“Statistically significant” (sometimes simply stated as “significance”) indicates that a result is unlikely to have occurred by chance, according to a predefined threshold (commonly $p < .05$). It does not mean the effect is large, important, or meaningful in everyday life.

Example: A weight-loss program might show that participants lose, on average, 0.5 kg over 8 weeks, with $p < .05$. Statistically significant? Yes. Meaningful? Probably not — most people wouldn’t notice a half-kilogram difference.

Fun fact: Scientists rarely say something is proven. Why? Because research deals in evidence and probability, not certainty. Even strong findings are described as ***supported by data, not proven true***. It's about staying open to new evidence.

2. Correlation ≠ causation

Two variables may move together without one causing the other.

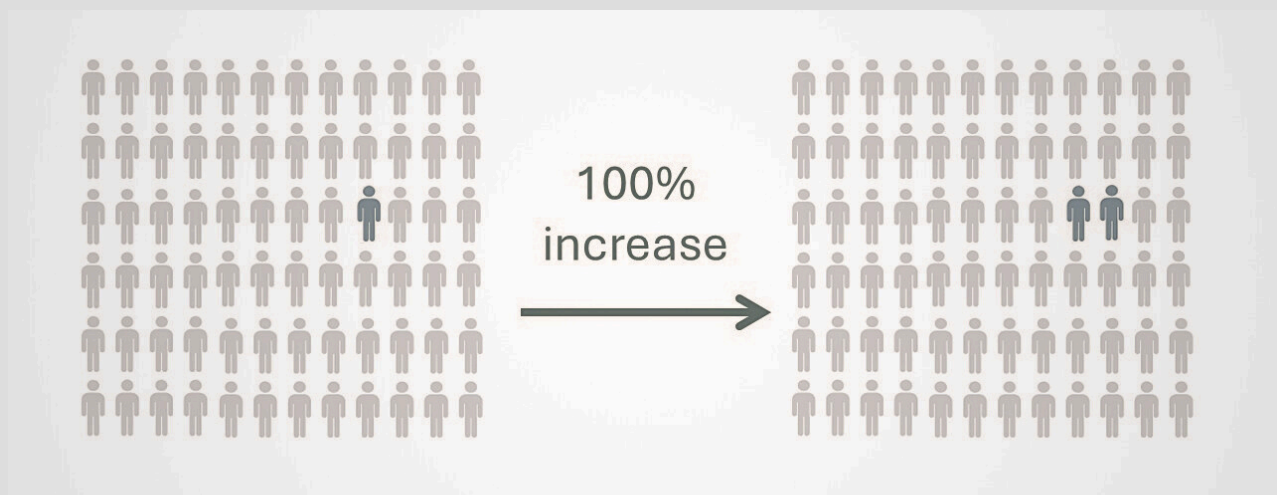
Example: Time spent on the internet correlates with feelings of loneliness. It may be tempting to blame internet use for loneliness, but it could equally be that lonely people spend more time online seeking connection. Misreading correlations as causation can misguide behavior, policy, and even therapy approaches.

3. Relative vs. absolute numbers

Relative numbers can sound more dramatic than they are.

Example: A supplement that claims that it “doubles the effect” compared to the previous version. Sounds impressive — but if the old supplement only added 5 minutes of sleep, the new one would add only 10 minutes. The absolute values may not seem as impressive as relative values, when the absolute values are small.

(Bodemer, Meder & Gigerenzer, 2014)

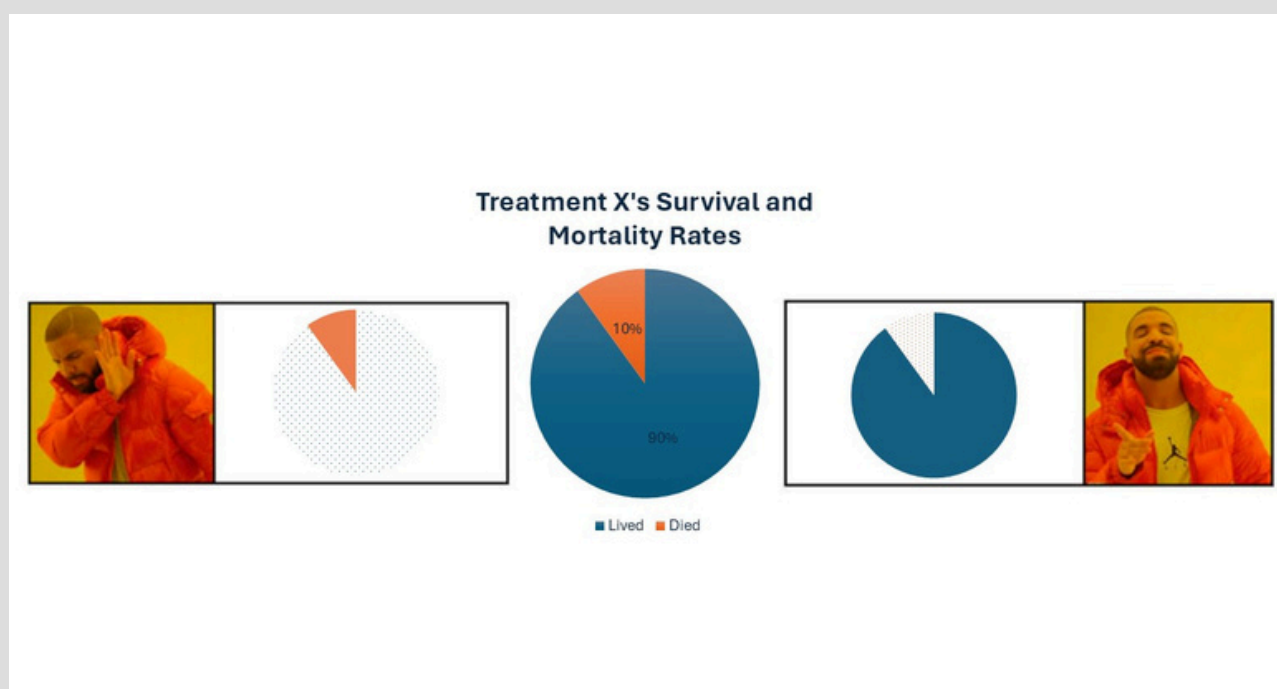


4. Positive vs. negative framing

The same statistic can feel very different depending on phrasing.

Example: “10% mortality” may feel alarming, whereas “90% survival” sounds optimistic — yet both describe the same outcome. Framing affects perception and emotional response, even when the numbers themselves are identical.

(Rosenblatt et al., 2018)



5. Temporal discounting (also known as “Future-me” problem)

We often downplay delayed consequences.

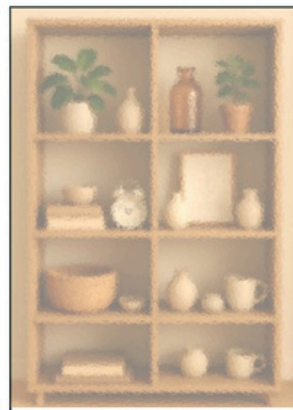
Example: Saving for retirement, paying off credit, or addressing chronic sleep debt may feel distant, so we postpone action. Numbers can worsen this effect: large future values (like compounding interest or accumulating sleep debt) can feel overwhelming, making us freeze rather than Breaking future risks into smaller, tangible short-term steps helps make decisions more manageable and rational.

(Seaman et al., 2022)

What would your future look like...



1 month from now.



1 year from now.



5 years from now.



10 years from now.

6. Large probability ≠ large effect

It's easy to assume that a high probability or frequent occurrence implies a large impact, but this isn't always the case.

Example: Imagine a game that claims a "90% chance of improving IQ." Intuitively, we might expect our IQ to improve dramatically — by 90 points if we play it every day! In reality, it means there's a high chance (90%) the game will improve our IQ by a small amount, maybe just 0.5 points.

7. Availability bias

We estimate likelihood based on what is memorable or recently encountered.

Example: Media coverage of rare events — a therapist misconduct case or an accident during a medical procedure — can make us overestimate how common these events are. Availability bias contributes to misperceptions of risk and overdiagnosis, particularly in mental health and medical contexts.



Communicating (and Understanding) Numbers

Here are three practical strategies to make statistics clearer and more human — for professionals communicating findings and for readers interpreting them.



Contextualise numbers

Put statistics into absolute, relatable terms. Instead of saying a treatment is “twice as effective”, provide concrete numbers such as “sleep duration increased by 10 minutes.” Concrete numbers make effects tangible and prevent overestimation caused by relative figures or ratios.

(Bodemer, Meder & Gigerenzer, 2014)

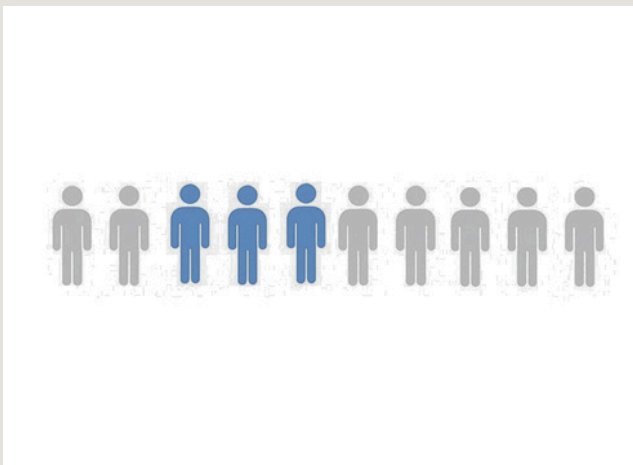


Use simple visuals

Graphs, icon arrays, and bar charts help readers quickly grasp probabilities and effect sizes. For instance, 100 small

icons with 2 shaded versus 3 shaded effectively shows absolute risk. Visualisation clarifies trends that are difficult to interpret from numbers alone, particularly for those less comfortable with math.

(Rosenblatt et al., 2018)





Translate numbers into everyday narratives

Graphs, icon arrays, and bar charts help readers quickly grasp probabilities and effect sizes. For instance, 100 small

Pair statistics with scenarios readers can relate to. “Participants of the sleep intervention showed improvement in sleep scores, which reflected in feeling more rested and hitting the snooze button less in the morning!” Stories make numbers meaningful and memorable, and they help bridge the gap between data and daily life. It is important, however, to ensure that the results are not exaggerated.

(Xu, 2022)



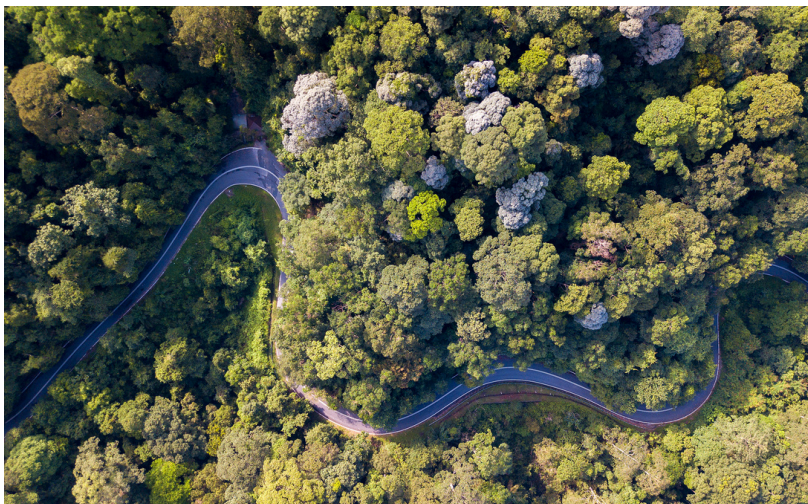
Communicating science well isn’t about dumbing it down — it’s about clarifying. Numbers gain meaning when we understand their context, scale, and limitations. Misunderstandings are natural, but they can be mitigated with thoughtful framing, clear visuals, and relatable examples.

Whether you’re a scientist sharing findings, a clinician guiding clients, or a reader navigating health news, the goal is the same: to think more clearly and make informed decisions. In the end, good science communication doesn’t just make us smarter — it helps us act wisely, confidently, and humanely.

From Greenwash to Green Trust: The Psychology of Communicating Sustainability

By Mr. Karl Lee

When was the last time you saw a brand claim to be **environmentally friendly**? How did that message make you feel? For a growing number of consumers, the answer is likely a mix of skepticism, confusion, and distrust. A recent global survey by GlobeScan showed that both people's exposure to and trust in sustainability messaging are on the decline:



The percentage of people reporting at least some exposure to brands communicating on being environmentally friendly dropped from 50% in 2022 to 36% in 2025; interestingly, consumers who were more often exposed to these messages reported being less trusting of them compared to previous years, falling from 78% in 2022 to 65% in 2025 (GlobeScan, 2025a).

The reduced exposure may be due to the widespread practice of “Greenhushing”, where companies intentionally choose not to publicize their sustainability efforts, fearing greenwashing accusations and regulatory uncertainty, despite continuing internal work (South Pole, 2023). However, even with more deliberate, selective messaging, those who continue their sustainability communications are still struggling to win consumer trust. This article explores the psychological mechanisms behind this “trust crisis” and what makes sustainability communication truly beneficial.

Key Drivers of Consumer Skepticism

The current crisis can be understood through three major psychological and communication barriers.

1. The Broader Trust Deficit

Companies are currently among the **least trusted institutions** to operate in the best interest of society, according to a GlobeScan survey (GlobeScan, 2025b). Repeated exposure to historical greenwashing may have created a generalized "trust deficit". For consumers, this has contaminated the perception of entire sectors, causing skepticism to become the default response to all environmental messaging, even from truly sustainable brands.



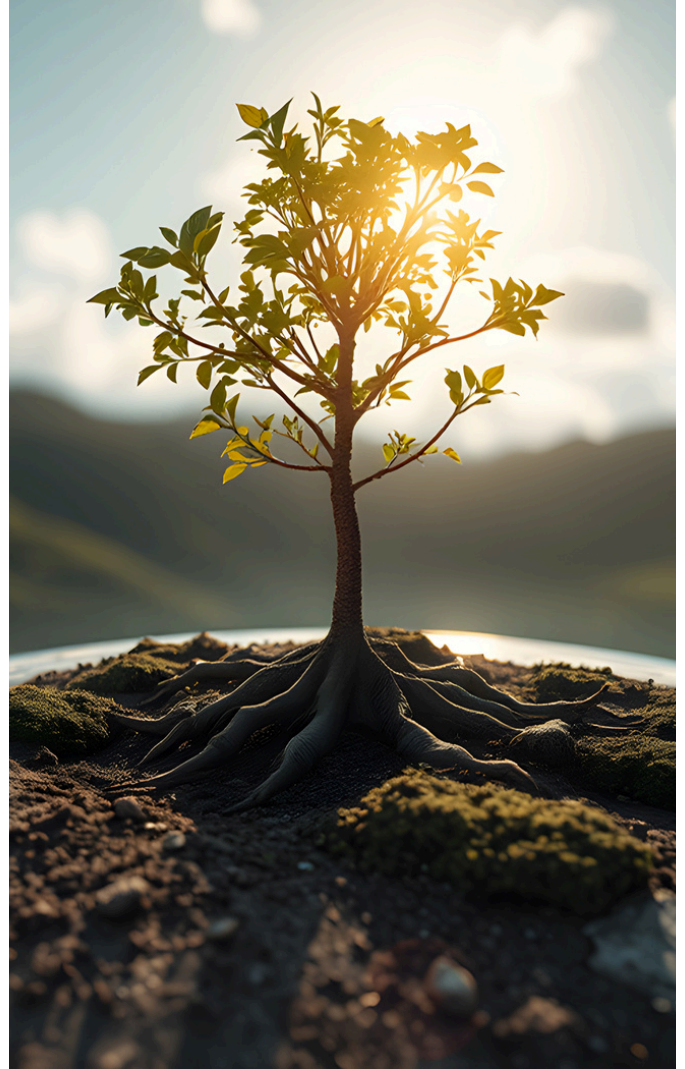
This mechanism can be explained by Attribution Theory, which focuses on how people explain the causes of events or behaviors (Weiner, 1986). When an action is observed, people immediately try to determine if its cause is internal (e.g., character, values, intentions) or external (e.g., environmental pressures, profit incentives). After multiple instances of deception, consumers develop a default external attribution bias toward green claims. Instead of assuming a brand's motivation is authentic or internal (e.g., "They genuinely care about the planet"), they automatically assume the motive is external (e.g., "They only did this for profit" or "They are image-controlling"). When consumers attribute a company's action to a self-serving, external motive, their attitude quickly turns negative, leading to distrust and a reluctance to support the brand (Hameed et al., 2023; Weiner, 1986). This generalized cynical mindset makes recognition incredibly difficult for any brand.



2. Lack of Transparency and Concrete Proof

Brands are increasingly challenged to provide the specific, verifiable data that modern consumers demand. Vague or generic claims are largely mistrusted and viewed as mere marketing gimmicks. The resulting abundance of conflicting and vague information causes consumer confusion, which creates a feeling of perceived risk — the risk of supporting a deceptive company — ultimately undermining trust (Luan et al., 2025; Spence, 1973).

This barrier is best understood through Signaling Theory, a key model in behavioral science and consumer psychology (Luan et al., 2025; Spence, 1973). In a marketplace with information asymmetry (where the company knows the true sustainability performance, but the consumer doesn't), the company must send credible signals to be trusted. These signals must be costly or difficult to fake. Vague claims like "eco-friendly" are low cost to fake, so they are often ignored or immediately trigger suspicion. In contrast, concrete proof — such as third-party certifications — are expensive to fake. These "costly signals" are essential for reducing information asymmetry and establishing credibility with consumers.



3. Rising Scrutiny and Negative Word-of-Mouth

As consumers become more environmentally aware and gain the tools to verify information, their scrutiny has increased. When consumers feel betrayed, they can easily use social media and negative word-of-mouth to damage a brand's image.



This response is often amplified by Psychological Reactance Theory, which posits that when people perceive an attempt to influence them as a threat to their freedom to choose or act, they experience anger and negative thoughts (reactance) (Brehm, 1966). Overly prescriptive, moralizing, or forceful marketing that implies what a consumer must do for the planet's sake can be perceived as a threat to their freedom to decide. For instance, when a bakery chain introduces a plastic bag fee, if the consumer perceives the primary motivation as a profit-driven move rather than a genuine, necessity-driven environmental effort, the fee is viewed as a restriction on their purchasing freedom. The result of this reactance is resistance to the message, disparagement of the source, and even negative word-of-mouth to assert cognitive freedom (Brehm, 1966; Kavvouris et al., 2020).





The path from greenwash to green trust requires a fundamental shift in communication strategy. Brands must abandon the low-cost-to-fake language that triggers cynicism and embrace high-cost-to-fake transparency and proof. By understanding the core psychological drivers — Attribution Theory (to shift motives from external to internal), Signaling Theory (to establish credibility through verifiable and valuable data), and Psychological Reactance Theory (to respect consumer autonomy) — brands can begin to close the trust deficit and build a more sustainable relationship with the increasingly skeptical global consumer.

How to Rebuild Green Trust

Brands can actively use these same psychological mechanisms to rebuild trust.

- **Demonstrate Authenticity (Attribution Theory):** By moving beyond vague claims and sharing detailed, verifiable data, brands can encourage consumers to make an authentic internal attribution (e.g., "They genuinely care and are putting resources behind it") rather than a cynical external one.
- **Use Costly Signals (Signaling Theory):** Brands must commit to doing, not just telling. This means investing in and communicating the high-cost-to-fake signals such as:
 1. Third-party certifications
 2. Detailed supply-chain transparency
 3. Quantifiable, audited impact reports.
- **Avoid "Moral Shaming" (Psychological Reactance Theory):** Communication should inform and empower, not shame or coerce. Marketing messages should avoid being overly prescriptive or moralizing, which can trigger reactance. By respecting the consumer's freedom to choose, brands can foster a more positive reception and reduce the risk of negative word-of-mouth.



The Illusion of Precision: Speaking the Truth in Shades of Grey

By Dr Sunita Rai (PsyD, CMT-P, CMSAC)

Clarity is not always honesty. In psychology, nuance is its own kind of truth.

For a client seeking answers or a policymaker designing interventions, an oversimplified message can mislead, confuse, or even harm.

In psychology, we live with complexity. But when we translate research into public communication, presentations, or policy briefs, we often iron out the nuance. What we lose in the name of clarity may cost us more than we realise.

As psychologists, our responsibility is not just to gather data—but to share it in a way that honours the full truth, even when it's messy. That's where mindfulness becomes more than a therapeutic tool—it becomes an ethical compass for communication.



How Clean Stories Can Cloud Understanding

Imagine you're explaining a study. The findings aren't world-shattering, but they do suggest a link between screen time and mood. You're aware the sample was small, the effect size modest, the direction of causality unknown. But you're tired. The journal wanted a catchy title. The media asked for a quote. You say:

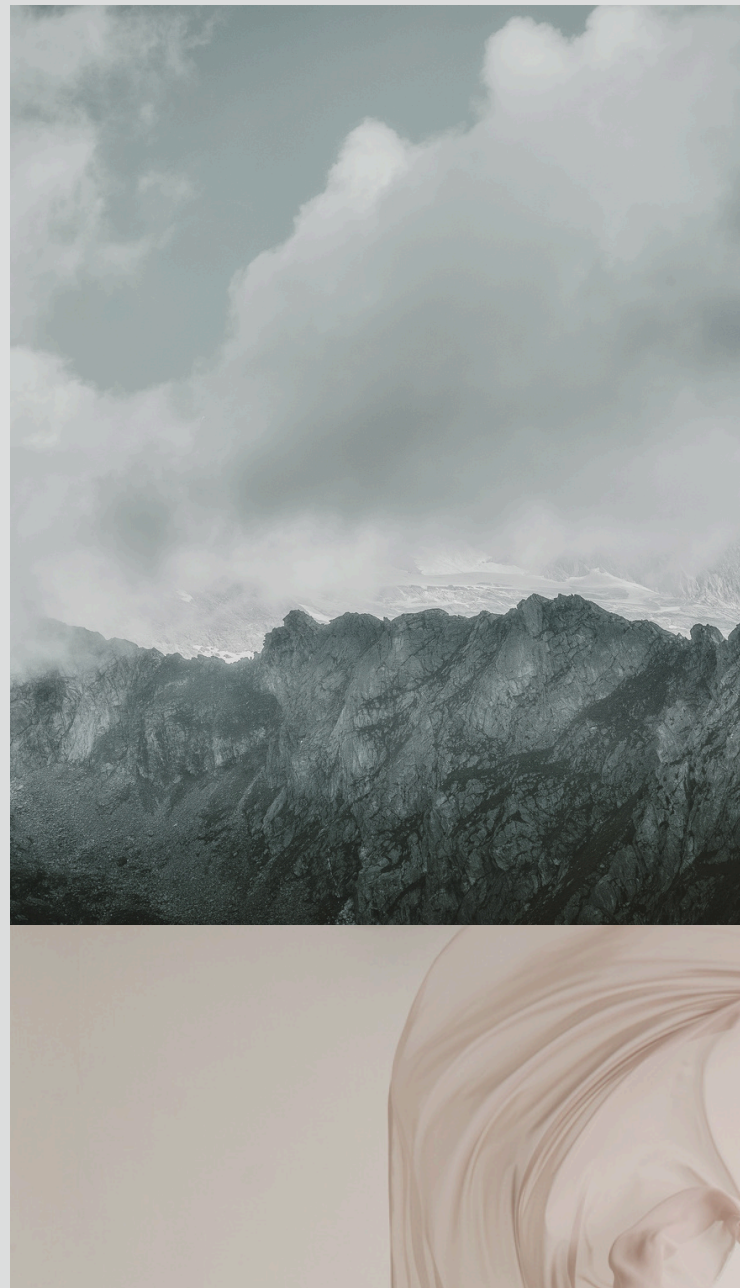
"Screen time causes depression."

And just like that, complexity is gone.

This isn't fiction. A study found that most press releases on psychology and health topics omit important caveats and often include exaggerated causal claims or misleading advice, and that misleading headlines often originate from the scientists themselves, not journalists (Sumner et al., 2014).

A Mindful Alternative

"Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally, ... And then I sometimes add, in the service of self understanding and wisdom" (Kabat-Zinn, 2017, para. 2). But mindfulness isn't just for therapy—it can be a communication ethic.



A mindful communicator slows down. They notice the urge to embellish, to impress, to simplify. And they choose honesty over impact.

They might say:

“Our early findings suggest a possible association, but more research is needed to understand the direction and strength of this link.”

Although Jones and Hansen (2015) focus on mindful supportive communication rather than statistical data-reporting, their findings on awareness, non-reactivity, and clarity in communication provide useful insights for communicating data without bias. For psychologists, these qualities encourage greater empathy, emotional regulation, and authenticity when discussing findings—helping ensure that interpretations remain transparent, balanced, and free from defensive or confirmatory bias. Research shows that when scientists communicate uncertainty transparently—particularly using clear numerical ranges—public trust generally remains stable and may even be strengthened through perceived honesty (van der Bles et al., 2020).

The Psychology of the Oversell

Why do we sometimes push certainty? Because ambiguity is uncomfortable, people tend to interpret information—including statistical data—through cognitive biases that favour quick, intuitive judgments over deliberate analysis (Kahneman, 2011). The same biases affect us when we write.





There's also pressure. Academic reward structures favour novelty and clarity. The media wants headlines, not humility. Funders want impact.

But when we oversimplify in our communication, we distort not only the findings—but also the public's understanding of psychology itself.

Gelman and Loken (2014) caution that treating statistical significance as the key to publication creates perverse incentives, leading researchers down a “garden of forking paths” where flexible, data-driven analyses yield misleading results and weaken scientific honesty.



A Better Metaphor for Communicating Psychology

Instead of thinking of communication as delivering answers, what if we saw it as lighting a campfire?

You're not there to blind anyone with a spotlight. You're there to offer warmth, context, a space to think. You share the data with your audience—not to “convince” them, but to invite curiosity.

This approach aligns with mindfulness principles: being present, patient, and kind in the way we transmit ideas. So, how do we light that campfire in real-world psychology communication? Here are some practices grounded in mindfulness to guide the way.

Practical Tips for Psychologists

Whether you're teaching, presenting, publishing, or posting—these practices help anchor your communication in mindfulness:

1. **Name What You Know—and What You Don't**

Avoid overstating findings. Clearly distinguish between evidence-based conclusions and hypotheses or interpretations.

2. **Resist the Urge to Please**

Be aware of the subtle pressure to make results more impressive. Ask yourself: is this clarity for the reader's sake, or for acceptance and approval?

3. **Include the Messy Bits**

Highlight limitations, methodological context, and uncertainties up front—not in the footnotes. Transparency earns long-term trust.

4. **Be Honest in Uncertainty (Especially in Crises)**

In times of crisis, confidently acknowledging what we don't know—by being transparent about uncertainty and evidence quality—enhances credibility and fosters informed decision-making (Schneider et al., 2023).

5. **Choose Curiosity Over Certainty**

Share findings as invitations to explore, not conclusions to defend. Use language that opens inquiry, such as "suggests," "may indicate," or "warrants further research."

6. **Engage in Reflective Supervision**

Use peer or supervisor feedback to check for unconscious bias or oversimplification in how you present data.



7. Be Transparent About Emotion

Acknowledge if stress, ambition, or self-doubt may be shaping how you're framing information. Mindful self-awareness protects communication integrity.

8. Avoid Graphical Manipulation

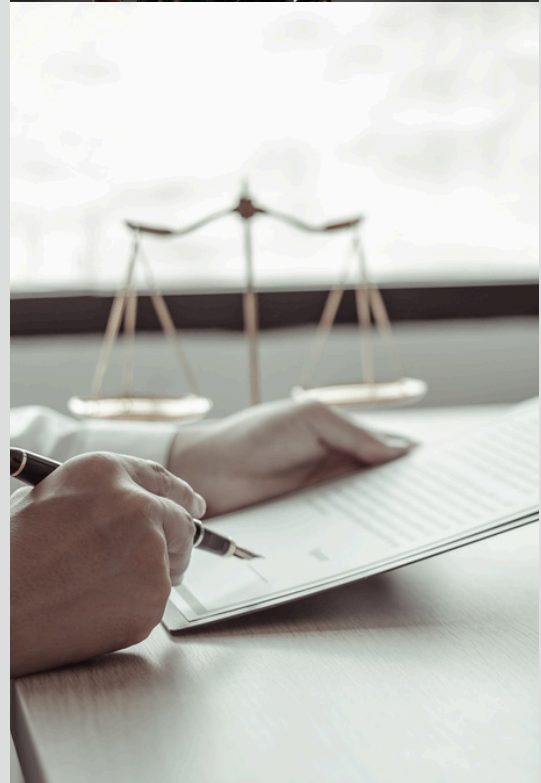
Design visuals with care: don't truncate axes, distort scale, or highlight only favourable results. Let your visuals speak with as much honesty as your words.

Conclusion: We Are Storytellers, Not Stat Machines

Psychology is not a mechanical science. It's a human one. The variables we study—grief, hope, trauma, attention—don't behave like planets or atoms. They shift, swirl, and resist neat conclusions.

Mindful communication asks us to honour that truth. To speak in shades of grey. To respect our audience enough to let them wrestle with the nuance.

And maybe most of all—to treat data not as a script to recite, but as a conversation to invite.





Pretty Charts, Ugly Truths: The Ethics of Data Storytelling

By Ms. Shamini Ganasarajah

“Data don’t lie — until we teach them how.”

The Seductive Power of a Chart

We’ve all been there. It’s late. The dataset’s messy. The deadline’s close. The chart works — but with one small tweak (a tighter y-axis, a cleaner palette), it suddenly looks... better.

It’s not lying, right? It’s just a better design.

Welcome to the grey zone of data storytelling — where beauty and bias often share the same PowerPoint slide.

A single visual can summarize a hundred pages of research. It can also tell a story the data never meant to. After years of turning numbers into narratives — from academic papers to brand decks — I’ve learned this: the biggest ethical risk in research isn’t what we measure. It’s *how* we show it.

Small Tweaks, Big Lies

A few years ago, I reviewed a chart comparing wellbeing scores across age groups. The difference was barely two percentage points. But the y-axis started at 80. Suddenly, it looked like a generational crisis. The data hadn’t changed. The story had.

These little “white lies” are everywhere. Stretch the axis. Recolor the bars. Smooth the jagged line. None of it feels unethical — just “clarifying.” But each choice nudges perception. Stack enough of them, and you’re no longer reporting. You’re directing (Cairo, 2019).

And the pressure is real. Clients want headlines. Stakeholders want simplicity. Social media wants everything to fit in one square. So we tidy, crop, round, and reframe — not to deceive, but to “make it land.” Clarity becomes a convenient excuse for distortion (Correll, 2019).



Design Is Never Neutral

Here’s the uncomfortable truth: design is psychology. Every color, scale, and font choice triggers emotion.

- Start the axis at zero — you’re saying, “Relax, it’s fine.”
- Zoom in — now it’s “Panic!”
- Red means urgency. Blue means calm.

We like to think visuals are objective. They’re not. They’re arguments in disguise. As Michael Correll puts it, “The more beautiful a chart, the more persuasive it becomes” (Harvard Data Science Review, 2022).

When Pretty Charts Backfire

A gorgeous chart might win a pitch or go viral. But if it's misleading, that win turns into a wound. Because once people lose trust, every chart you make looks suspicious — even the honest ones.

In academia, that means replication doubts.
In journalism, that means corrections.
In business, that means lost credibility.

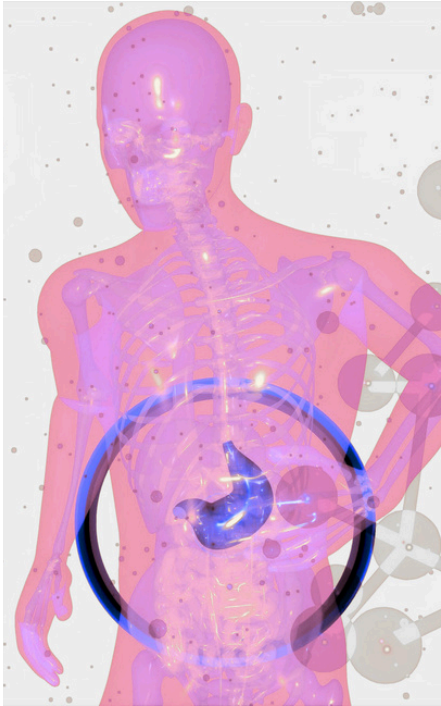
Your reputation rests on one promise: what you show is what you found. No gradient or hex code is worth breaking that (Wexler, 2021).



How to Tell Honest, Beautiful Stories

Good data storytelling doesn't mean being boring. It means designing with conscience. Here's what I live by:

1. Keep scales honest
 - a. Start at zero unless you have a damn good reason not to. And if you don't, say so.
2. Show uncertainty proudly.
 - a. Confidence intervals, margins of error, sample sizes — these aren't clutter. They're context. (Hullman, 2020)
3. Color with care.
 - a. Use palettes to explain, not to manipulate. Red isn't "bad" unless your data say so.
4. Anchor in context.
 - a. Numbers mean nothing in isolation. Always compare — to last year, to other groups, to a meaningful baseline.
5. Show your work.
 - a. List your sources, methods, and exclusions. Transparency isn't tedious — it's trust-building.



The Two-Question Gut Check

Before I hit export, I run two quick tests:

- The “So What?” Test: Does this help the reader understand why it matters?
- The “So Wrong?” Test: If someone screenshots this without context, could it mislead?

If the second answer is “maybe,” I fix it — even if it kills the punch. Because once a chart’s out there, you can’t control how it’s read (The Conversation, 2020).

Beauty and Integrity Aren’t Enemies

The best visuals don’t shout — they clarify. Design should be like good lighting: it helps the truth shine, not change the script. Ethics isn’t the opposite of aesthetics; it’s part of it. The real beauty of data storytelling isn’t in the gradient fill or the font pairing. It’s in showing someone else what you saw — without distortion.

One Last Question

Before you hit export, ask yourself: Am I making this clearer — or just more clickable?

If it’s the latter, step back. The prettiest chart in the world means nothing if it hides the truth beneath it.

Data storytelling is like makeup — use it to enhance, not to catfish. Let’s keep our charts stunning, our captions transparent, and our ethics intact. Because the goal isn’t to make data look good. It’s to make the truth impossible to miss.



Psychology in the Headlines: Why We Need to Shape the Story, Not Just React to It

By Dr Nicola Cann, Sleep Psychologist

In recent years, there has been a marked increase of mental health media headlines, reflecting growing public interest (Breheny et al., 2023). Media both feeds and fuels this interest, actively constructing social norms based on their chosen narratives (Thompson, 2025). A neoliberal agenda shapes media narratives, emphasising individual responsibility, and commodifying mental health. Non-experts offer overly simplistic solutions that fail to acknowledge the structural and environmental determinants of mental health (Breheny et al., 2023). We are sold the idea that solutions are simple and can be bought. These solutions are particularly enticing to vulnerable and exhausted media consumers.

As someone who is active on social media and engages with mainstream media, I am often horrified by the oversimplification of psychological research. In fact I've been invited by journalists to comment on research papers that they have no intention of reading. Unfortunately a combination of tight deadlines and a lack of available experts for comment create pressure on journalists to produce inaccurate clickbait.

Sensationalist, fear-focused reporting can heighten anxiety and self blame, especially amongst more vulnerable audiences (Thompson, 2025).

IS THERE ANY GOOD NEWS?

Ofcom (2023) reported that 78% of people had used the internet to support their mental health, and the growing number of mental health influencers may be representative of a public who are more receptive to learning about different types of psychological support (White & Hanley, 2025). This appetite for digestible mental health information provides an opportunity for psychologists to share more nuanced perspectives.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM...

The Canadian Psychological Association assures us that the media “is not untrustworthy nor is it an adversary. It is a tool that you can use to disseminate science, advice, and hope, based on your own considerable expertise” (2021). The European Federation of Psychological Associations agrees, suggesting that psychologists “have a responsibility to share their knowledge, insights and expertise with the public through the media” (2011).



In a world of increasing mental health needs, online psychoeducation has proven a low-cost and scalable way to engage communities (Latha et al., 2020; Alonzo & Popescu, 2021). Though it cannot replace therapy, online psychoeducation can reduce stigma and encourage support-seeking (White & Hanley, 2025).

Increased representation in the media could also help the public to understand us better as a profession, providing a platform to engage people in discussions about who we are and how we can help (HCPC, 2024).



THE CHALLENGES

To engage the public in more nuanced narratives around mental health we need to be interesting, jargon-free and memorable (CPA, 2021). As psychologists this may not come naturally as we are trained to communicate in ways that are accurate and legally defensible. And whilst, as a profession, we are good communicators, translating psychological theory and research into pithy statements or instagram reels can be tricky.



Psychologists who work with the media typically report concerns about **maintaining credibility and professionalism** when making typos on Instagram or being misquoted by a journalist. In particular psychologists worry about 'scrutiny' from other psychologists (White & Hanley, 2025). Another common concern is how our contributions will be represented and perceived (White & Hanley, 2025). Sure, we can be misquoted, or misinterpreted, but **clear, evidence-based communication helps reduce these risks.**

BECOMING A 'MENTAL HEALTH INFLUENCER'

Not ready to start pitching to journalists? You could start by using social media to share research findings, or sharing information from psychologists already doing this work. Two of my favourite 'celebrity' psychologists are Richard Wiseman and Dr Julie Smith, both of whom are doing great work making psychology more accessible. Wiseman's advice is to "cut out the middleman; blog, twitter, use Facebook. Film your research and put it on YouTube" (BPS, 2010).

If you're ready to become a 'mental health influencer' (Triplett et al., 2022), my advice is to start at the edge of your comfort zone. Join platforms like Featured ([featured.com](https://www.featured.com)) or Qwoted ([qwoted.com](https://www.qwoted.com)) to see what journalists need, or pitch an article. Or write an article for this magazine! It can feel daunting at first - I prepped for my first podcast appearance like my life depended on it - but many of these things become fun once you've navigated them a few times.



PEER SUPPORT

Professional guidelines tend to be focused on risk management, but some actively encourage media engagement. Check the American Psychological Association (2025), European Federation of Psychological Associations, (2011), and Canadian Psychological Association (2021) for practical advice.

Behind the scenes our professional bodies are also doing their part, preparing press releases and advising media outlets on accurate representations of mental health (Mind; BPS, 2021).

Taking the plunge can be daunting, so I recommend joining a networking group or sourcing supervision from a psychologist experienced in media work. These connections will help you to identify and address any ethical issues, and manage the challenges of being online.



IN CONCLUSION...

Media work can be challenging, but I've also found it to be a rewarding and creative experience. In challenging the reductionist narratives dominating the media we need to be bold and reclaim this space, celebrating complexity and creating more meaningful narratives. And who knows, perhaps one of you reading this will be the next celebrity psychologist!

Is 1% Really That Rare?

Rethinking Giftedness in Singapore

By Mr Barry Tse

IT IS A SCORCHING AFTERNOON AT DOWNTOWN EAST.

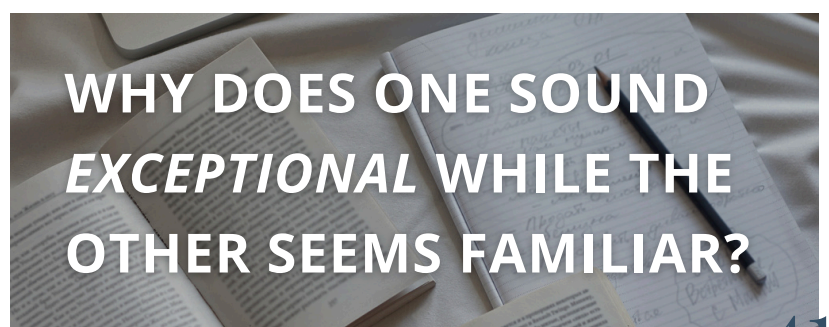


The air smells faintly of chlorine from the nearby Wild Wild Wet water park. Inside the mall, a group of schoolchildren in white uniforms queue at Mixue, clutching coins and laughing as vanilla ice cream spirals from the humming machine. Somewhere among them might be one of the eighteen Primary 3 children in Pasir Ris who have just received the letter marking them as **“gifted”**. Three from each of the six primary schools’ P3 classes in the neighbourhood; **the top 1% of their cohort.**

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION’S PHRASE “TOP 1%”

carries the weight of authority, yet when pictured as three P3 children in every school, the aura of exclusivity softens. As they chase one another past the food court, they look just like any other kids. The label sounds elite on paper, but it feels almost ordinary in life.

“Top 1%” sounds prestigious, almost unreachable, but “three children in a school of 300” feels tangible and close. **Both are mathematically identical**, yet they stir **different emotions**.



STATISTICAL PERCEPTION

Psychologists have long studied how the mind interprets numbers, not as neutral facts but as stories shaped by perception and bias. One explanation lies in **denominator neglect**. As Denes-Raj and Epstein (1994) showed, people tend to focus on the numerator—the “three”—while overlooking the denominator—the “three hundred”. Our minds **grasp small numbers more easily** than large ones. “Three in a school” triggers an image of real children, but “1%” removes the human reference entirely. It becomes abstract, detached, and strangely powerful. The less we can visualise, the more distant and impressive it feels. Our brains also **mistake abstraction for importance**.



This is captured by **construal level theory**, proposed by Trope and Liberman (2003). They found that abstract information feels **psychologically distant**.

Percentages belong to the realm of ideas; counts belong to the realm of people. The further away something feels, the rarer and more special it seems. “1%” evokes exclusivity because it exists at the level of concept rather than experience. It lifts ordinary variation into the realm of myth.



FRAMING EFFECTS



How we frame information adds another layer of distortion. Tversky and Kahneman (1981) showed that **identical facts can produce very different reactions** depending on how they are presented (Framing Effect). Percentages and ratios are not interchangeable. A percentage feels formal and conclusive; a count feels personal and conversational. Framing shapes emotion as much as understanding. Even when we understand the logic, presentation still matters. The **format of a number** can shift our feelings before we realise it.

Cognitive scientist Gerd Gigerenzer (2003) argued that **people reason more easily with frequencies** such as “three in three hundred” than with percentages or sometimes referred to as the Natural Frequency Framing. **Our minds evolved to think in whole numbers**, not decimals. Ironically, this ease of understanding can make frequencies feel more ordinary. Percentages, though harder to process, seem more sophisticated and official. They sound like the language of expertise. This helps explain why “1%” commands such reverence even when it means only a handful of children.



Once we see how presentation shapes perception, it becomes clear that **numbers are never just technical facts**. They are narrative tools. Statistician David Spiegelhalter (2019) reminds us that numbers never speak for themselves. They gain meaning only through the stories we attach to them. Charles Wheelan (2013) makes a similar point: **statistics persuade not because they are profound, but because they sound precise**.

"1%" FEELS BOTH AUTHORITATIVE AND MYSTERIOUS, INVITING US TO INFER MORE THAN IT ACTUALLY STATES.



That narrative power carries responsibility. How we talk about data determines whether it informs or divides, especially when the subject is children. Research on science communication shows that **facts alone seldom change minds**. People interpret numbers through the stories that surround them—stories of fairness, competition, and hope. Developmental psychologists Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Roberta Golinkoff (2007) argue that translating research for the public requires not only accuracy but empathy. Audiences do not simply need data; **they need to see themselves within it**. Communicating statistics about children, therefore, carries an **ethical weight**. It asks psychologists to connect numbers back to lives.

These insights come alive in Singapore's **Gifted Education Programme (GEP)**, where statistics move from policy to personal experience. The GEP often becomes an emotional issue for families. Each November, parents and children experience a mix of joy and anxiety as envelopes are opened and social media fills with talk of cut-off scores. The numbers identify quickly, but they cannot capture the emotions involved. The GEP was designed to identify students who learn faster or reason more deeply.



HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO SINGAPORE?

But once publicly discussed, the numbers took on **social meaning**, becoming markers of **identity and status**. Seen this way, the purpose of the GEP, and of statistics in general, is not to label but to illuminate. Psychologists see their role as helping people understand that these figures are only part of a child's developing abilities, not definitive labels. Recent reforms, including teacher observations, recognise that talent develops over time. Psychologists can help shift the focus from narrow qualification criteria to supporting every child's growth, reminding us that **numbers should never define worth**.

Back at Downtown East, the Mixue queue has thinned. The smell of waffle cones lingers in the air. The children wander toward the arcade, still laughing, still sticky with sugar. Somewhere among them are those eighteen "top 1%," though no one could tell who they are. Perhaps that is the quiet wisdom numbers conceal: they matter most when we remember the people behind them. **When psychologists help society read data with compassion rather than competition, statistics cease to divide and begin to enlighten.**

Recognising False Psychology on Social Media

By DMiss Aowei Chen

BPsychSc student, James Cook University Singapore

The dissemination of psychology through social media is extensive, but in fact, posts often contain pseudo-psychology. Before I started studying psychology, I often believed content promoted in the quick, "three-second" analysis videos on Xiaohongshu (a Chinese lifestyle social media platform) such as how to tell if someone likes you based on their smile response. However, through studying psychology, I found that people's behavior is influenced by various factors such as the environment, culture, and habits, and it is not absolute. Unlike traditional media, social media algorithms reward emotionally charged or authority-driven content, which amplifies pseudo-scientific messages.

After some reflection based on my status as a current student of psychology, I argue that pseudo-psychology misleads the public through authority, emotion, and anecdotes, and that psychology students should take responsibility to counter these trends.

Authority Bias

People tend to trust those who appear more professional or

authoritative, but these attributes are often not verified. This is called Authority Bias (Milhazes-Cunha & Oliveira, 2023). In short videos, presenters often wear white coats, suits, or glasses to project expertise. Although they may not state their qualifications, these cues make them seem like psychologists or researchers, despite having no formal background in psychology.



Such presenters often use phrases such as "Research shows..." or, "Some literature indicates that...", without providing clear references or indications of precisely what they are. These strategies create mental shortcuts for the viewer (Ahmad & Wu, 2024). This is a way in which our brain automatically and simply judges information to save energy. Such a strategy makes it easier for viewers to believe their content. However, a professional appearance and communication can increase trust in experts, which helps explain why this strategy is so persuasive when abused. To avoid being influenced by authority bias, viewers should verify a speaker's credentials and check whether the information is supported by peer-reviewed research.

Emotional Appeal

Emotional appeal is a persuasive strategy that influences people's thoughts or judgments by evoking intense emotions rather than relying on reason (Jeon et al., 2024). For example, short videos often claim, "If you constantly try to please others, you must have had childhood trauma." Others say, "These behaviours indicate that you have depression. Get tested quickly," aiming to evoke fear and keep viewers watching. In fact, this is a kind of affect heuristic (Skagerlund et al., 2020). When we judge whether something is real or worthy of attention, we often rely on our emotions rather than true logic. When information makes people feel intense emotions, they usually believe or are attracted. Sometimes, such posts are likely to be shared or promoted because they are very eye-catching. However, emotional appeal is not always negative. In health communication, for instance, moderate emotional messages can motivate positive behavioural change. The problem lies in that, when emotions take the place of evidence, it leads to distorted or exaggerated psychology. Before I studied psychology, I always believed in these types of content. However, nowadays, I pause to consider whether the content is supported by credible literature and remind myself that emotional resonance does not equal scientific validity.



Anecdotal Fallacy

Anecdotal Fallacy refers to the use of personal experience to prove a specific theory, but it is not necessarily universal (Freling et al., 2020). For instance, what kind of methods did the blogger use to relieve anxiety or depression quickly? It seems that experiments were conducted on oneself, and thereby appear to have a certain degree of scientific validity. This will make the audience think that this method must also work for me. In fact, it is not only the authenticity of the technique itself, but also whether the result can be generalised and universal, that is worthy of questioning.



Some bloggers have also released videos demonstrating how they can effect change by adopting specific habits, giving their listeners hope and inspiring them to believe that transforming mental illness or mindset is achievable through small habits. This is primarily due to a phenomenon called Narrative Bias (Moore et al., 2024). This explains that people are often drawn to vivid stories and neglect the truth and logic of the events.



Nonetheless, personal stories are not entirely harmful. When used responsibly, they can humanise scientific ideas and make psychological knowledge more relatable. After I started to learn more about psychology, I gradually developed better strategies to deal with narrative bias. First, we should engage in critical thinking about the information disseminated on the Internet to distinguish authenticity. Next, even if the information is true, we should also identify individual differences, considering that perhaps the blogger's approach may not apply to me. Before re-verifying the information used, conduct a comparative analysis to see if different studies have reached similar conclusions. Anecdotes can inspire and connect people, but they should never be treated as scientific proof.



Professional Responsibility in Communicating Psychology

As a psychology student, I have realised my responsibility when sharing professional knowledge. For instance, when I talk about treatment methods or concepts, I must provide genuine results rather than my own perceptions. False information during the dissemination process not only misleads the public by oversimplifying their understanding of professional knowledge but also leads to incorrect perceptions. Depending on the specific information, this can also lead to

misplaced trust in those purporting to be professionally trained, and thereby damaging actual practitioner-patient relationships. For example, when I collect information about therapists independently, I should use my critical judgment. First, I consider from a third-person perspective whether the information I obtain comes from emotions, mental strategies, or theoretical logic, as well as the purpose of the information. Before truly and completely trusting and applying the information,

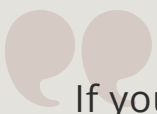
it is necessary to check the therapist's background and then verify the authenticity and reliability of their information source through peer-reviewed literature. In this way, the public can have a more accurate understanding of psychology.

In conclusion, social media is rife with misleading pseudo-psychology. Especially when using Authority appeal, Emotional appeal, and Anecdotal appeal to make the content seem very persuasive. The process of studying psychology made me realise that I should think before believing. As a psychological science student, I hope the content I share is reliable, responsible and helpful, rather than just for attracting attention.



Revisiting Science Communication in Clinical Practice: How to dialogue with patients opting for the use of psychotropic medication and evidence-based psychological treatment

*By Dr Daniela Schreier, Director and
Board-Certified Clinical Psychologist
at Ihsan Living Pte Ltd, Singapore and
S.M.A.R.T. Living LLC, USA*



If you can't explain it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it well enough.

— Albert Einstein

Nearly two decades ago researchers suggested American TV viewers were exposed to as many as 16 hours of prescription drug commercials per year. They mentioned that 95% of all ads had high emotional appeal as a common denominator (Frosch et al., 2007).



Drug commercials and media coverage have increased exponentially worldwide, given the rising attention to psychological conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder), awareness of the efficacy of combined treatment (psychotherapy in tandem with pharmacology), and the growing number of online marketing platforms and apps for products and mental health service providers.



pharmaceutical trial methodology and statistical significance of trial findings cannot be fully explained. Ads conclude with rapid-fire side effects explainers, while the primacy effect has already imprinted itself on the consumer: This drug will help me to feel and manage life better. In hopes for quick symptom relief, return to mental and emotional baseline or to end a progressive downward spiral, clients are receptive to heralds of good news including drug commercials, pamphlets, and social media posts.

In Singapore, the Health Sciences Authority (2025) strictly prohibits the advertising of prescription medication to the public, so drug commercials are not included in the country's internal news programming. Pharmaceutical commercials in the United States are subject to advertising guidelines. Not allowed to indicate success percentages, ads appeal to viewers' emotions. Due to advertising time constraints,



Psychologists* (please refer to the footnote for the explanation of the term) are the main rendering service providers for clients seeking diagnostic evaluation and treatment for recent and long-standing mental disorders. After the initial referral to a psychiatrist for medication evaluation and following a medication adjustment period, psychologists are responsible for client education, and monitoring medication compliance and side effects, because clients see psychologists more regularly than psychiatrists. This makes precise and factual communication with clients about psychotropic medication not optional but mandatory.

In clinical practice, psychologists have an ethical responsibility to understand and communicate relevant data, research, and outcome studies in simple terms to clients and their loved ones. Psychologists do not act as medical doctors, but their education and training prepare them to work with clients who use psychotropic medications. Competence, integrity, beneficence and non-maleficence

are fundamental ethical principles in mental healthcare (American Psychological Association, 2017; Singapore Psychological Society, 2019), whereby competence is the key word for psychologists' providing services to clients who require medication monitoring.





Understanding and conveying drug research data in lay terms is key to managing clients' expectations and fears in an ethical manner. When it comes to communicating about medication, this writer suggests being precise and setting expectations: Finding the right drug can be a bit like meeting the right partner. It may take some time. This way, the client will not be surprised if the first choice does not work out and can be encouraged to develop patience and see treatment as a journey rather than a destination.

This practitioner has collaborated with a select group of psychiatrists for over a decade, sharing and referring clients. This long-term collaboration has strengthened the ability to discuss client symptoms, frequent check-ins, and mutual competence in reference to product limitations and potential side effects. Continued exchange among the treatment team has helped to avoid blind spots.

This article addressed some, but not all, of the key responsibilities of the treating psychologist when deciphering data storytelling in psychopharmacological product marketing.

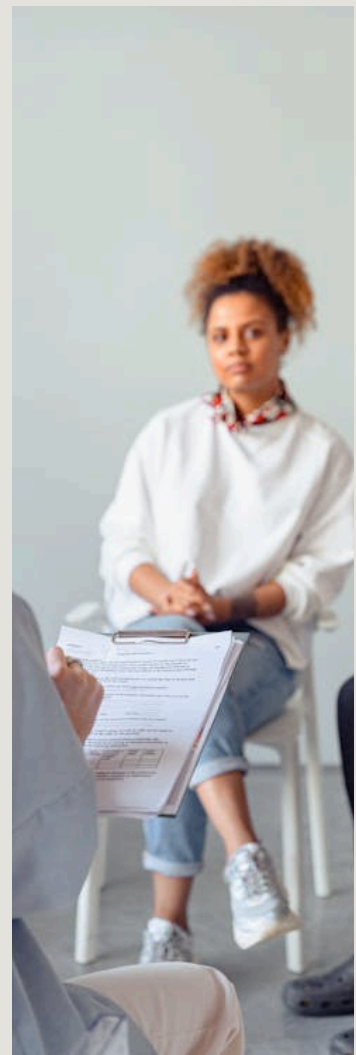
The final segment, Data Served Right: Six Communication Principles for Psychologists to Become Clear, Comprehensive, and Compassionate Data Ambassadors for Their Clients, may help address the ongoing drug conversation throughout the therapeutic process. Remember the mnemonic RINKAS—the Malay word for simple in terms of concise communication.

RINKAS – SIMPLE

R – Respond promptly to clients who want to discuss the use of psychotropic medication. Refer to a reputable psychiatrist – ideally you are working closely with them already. Manage expectations, as it may take time to find the right medication and adjust to it. A medication that works well for a friend or colleague may not have the same effect on the client. One size does not fit all.

I – Inquire about the client's reasons for seeking medication now and where they got information about a particular drug. Illustrate the pros and cons of medication and how individual biology (e.g., genetics and metabolism) influences how a client responds to a drug. As a psychologist, stay informed about mental health drugs as required by your professional regulations.

N – Normalize the client's desire for quick improvement; stress the importance of medication compliance and client participation in treatment. Name potential side effects the client may experience and explain how they can track a decrease in severity of symptoms over the next two months. Encourage keeping a notebook to track side effects, gradual changes, and symptom relief.



K – Keep the dialogue open:

With the client: It is the psychologist's duty to check on medication at each session and note any updates or concerns.

With your colleagues: Maintain open communication with the prescribing psychiatrist.

Keep your credentials up to date by attending continuing education courses and lectures related to psychopharmacology and engage in mixed peer groups of psychiatrists and psychologists discussing psychopharmacology matters.



A - Assert medication compliance; explain that prescription medication needs to be taken on time and for a certain length of time. Being compliant is not easy. Changes must be discussed with the psychiatrist/treatment team. Explain neuroplasticity, or the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections and explain why psychotropic medications need time to work and build functionality. Be specific and provide details about the prescribed medication as outlined in research and reports.

S – Support clients starting and continuing their medication journey. If they want to stop or change their medications, advise them to do so under guidance of their psychiatrist to avoid complications. Keep studying and getting supervision.

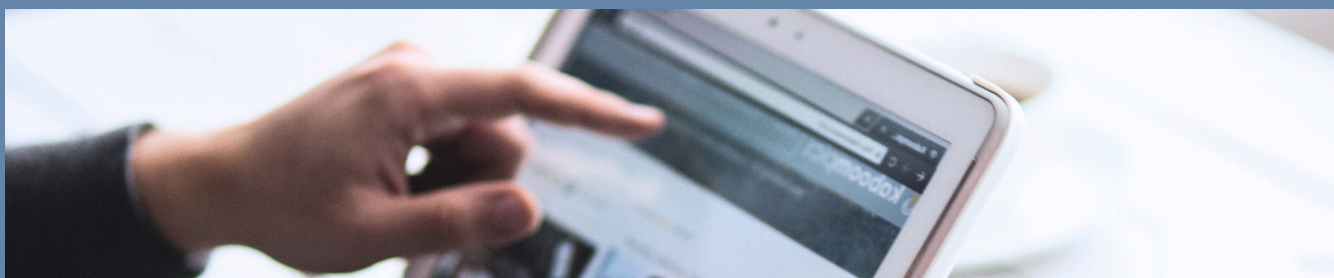
**Psychologist: In this article, "psychologist" refers to a mental health practitioner who earned a doctorate, completed coursework, internships, and postdoc requirements, and is licensed in the USA or a country with similar doctoral licensure requirements or registered in Singapore with the Singapore Psychological Society. They have completed doctoral coursework in psychopharmacology, physiological psychology, and diagnostics.*

A Practical Guide on Science Communication for Psychologists

By Dr Jonathan Kuek



In our contemporary digital landscape, societies are faced with a deluge of information, both accurate and inaccurate, that spreads with unprecedented speed and scale. This phenomenon, first termed by David Rothkopf as an 'infodemic', is often misdiagnosed as a simple problem of false content overwhelming factual content (Zielinski, 2021). However, the persistence and proliferation of misinformation are not merely technological artifacts; they reflect our cognitive architecture and are appealing because they frequently exploit the innate biases, emotional triggers, and social drivers that govern human belief. To navigate this new frontier effectively and thrive in an age where misinformation and distrust in traditional institutions are prevalent, psychologists must evolve from practices centered on the pure dissemination of information to psychologically grounded approaches that appeal, persuade, and convince, while maintaining scientific rigor. To that end, this guide aims to provide practical, useful information on how to achieve this.





Harnessing the Power of Stories

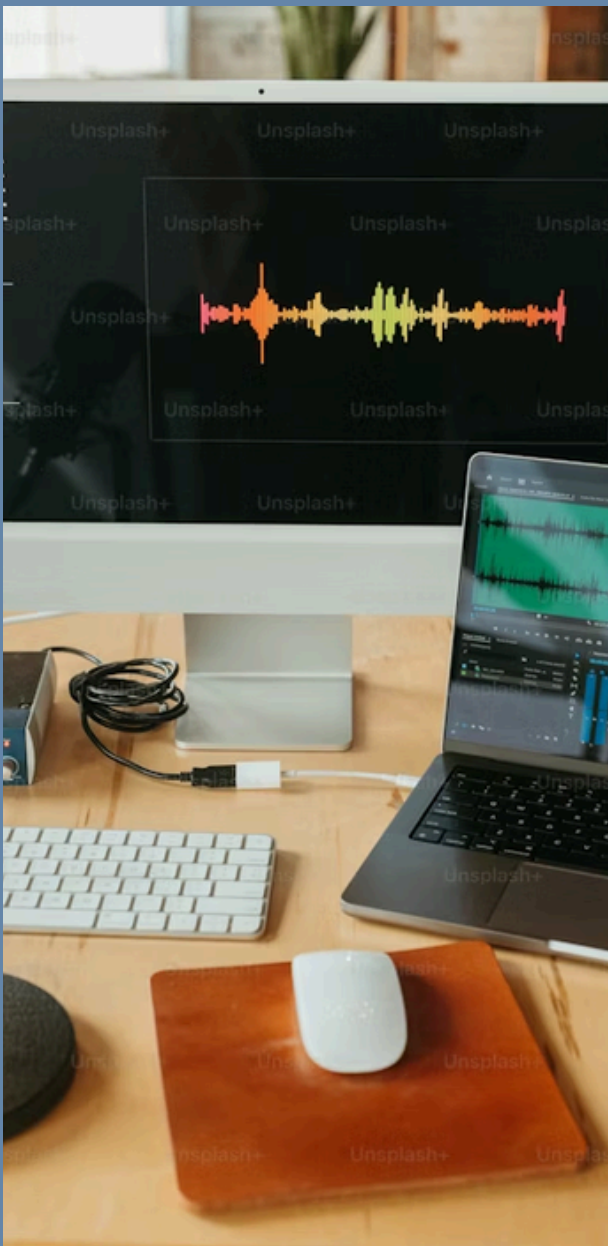
The human brain is not wired to process spreadsheets, data, and complex information; it is wired for stories. Hence, narratives are privileged and processed more efficiently, understood more intuitively, and remembered more vividly than abstract, logical-scientific exposition (Dahlstrom, 2014). Inherently, a well-told story provides the essential elements our brains seek to make sense of the world: characters we can relate to, a plot that establishes causality, a conflict that creates tension, and a resolution that provides meaning. To that end, psychologists must embrace the role stories play in the lives of laypeople and leverage them to convey their message.

For example, instead of presenting a list of reasons why using social media may be harmful to youths' self-esteem, framing the

information as a compelling narrative could make it more memorable. A story featuring a young person as the central figure (relatable character), their negative experiences with social media (plot), underlying thoughts they had while going through them (conflict and tension), and a choice to walk away from social media for their well-being (resolution), could be highly impactful and resonate with other youths who may be going through similar situations on social media.



This approach has several psychological advantages, such as increased engagement and recall through greater emotional connection and by bypassing identity defenses, encouraging the audience to identify with the characters in the story. Such a phenomenon is underpinned by transportation theory, which suggests that when people can relate to and see themselves in the narratives being attended to, their attitudes and beliefs are more likely to change (Green & Brock, 2000).



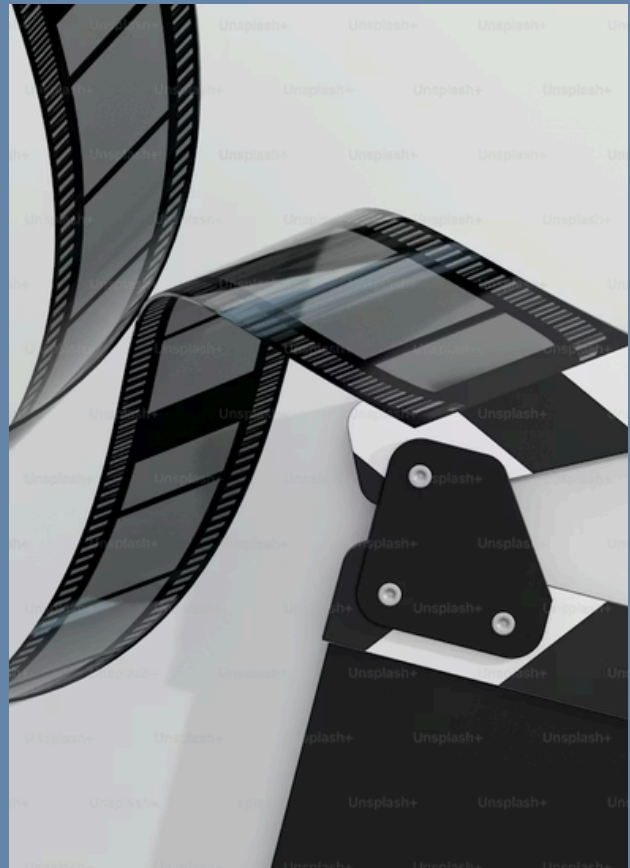
Mind Your Visuals

Much like stories, the use of visual modalities leverages the human mind's inherent “laziness” and helps it attend to information more effectively. Creating and using effective visuals alongside a strong narrative can make a message more powerful and impactful than either alone. Some best practices for using video and visual elements include prioritizing entertainment, focusing on short, fast-paced videos, balancing visual complexity, capitalizing on broader cultural trends, and understanding the culture of different media platforms (Montes et al., 2025; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

Using the example above and applying these practices, a psychologist may create an image carousel, a skit, or short video (different platforms)

may result in different type of visual format) that shows a young person partaking in a social media trend and having fun with it before posting their content (incorporation of trend and prioritization of entertainment), after which the negative interactions and comments start flooding in (relatable story), ending with a scene of the young person simply putting their phone down and heading out to hang out with their friends instead (fast-paced video that should take no longer than 30 to 60 seconds), while flashing a catchy slogan (e.g., connection trends when social media ends) that conveys the main message.

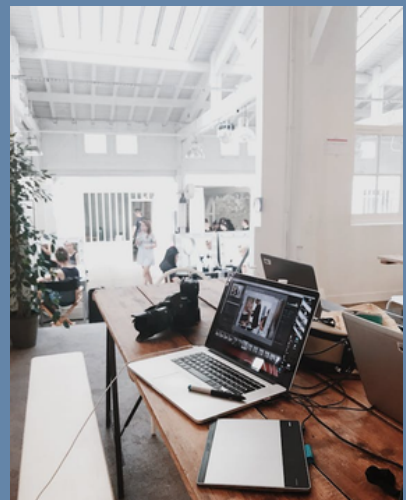
Given the ubiquitous role of visual media in society, ensuring they are used intentionally and with the audience, purpose, and clarity in mind is crucial to their effectiveness (Vandemeulebroecke et al., 2019). Visuals are so effective because they add a separate dimension that people can interact with if audio or textual modalities are not particularly appealing. In doing so, we can



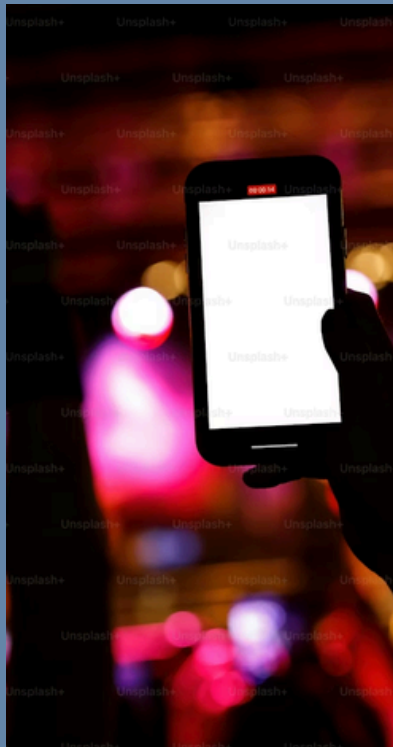
better capture and sustain their attention, thereby increasing the likelihood that our message is transmitted.

Choosing the “Right” Messenger

In an environment of high information clutter, one of the most powerful heuristics people use to evaluate information is the source's credibility. Crucially, research shows that public audiences can often weigh a messenger's trustworthiness more heavily than their formal expertise (Fisk & Dupress, 2014). Moreover, trust is not typically granted solely based on these titles and is also earned through shared identity, common values, and perceived authenticity (Kahan et al., 2011; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Hence, we must actively identify, empower, and collaborate with "trusted messengers" who have the ear of the specific communities we intend to reach, or work to build such trust and become one ourselves.



Once more, using the example above, an ideal messenger would unlikely be a psychologist, policymaker, or expert on the matter. Rather, an individual who actively uses social media and has experienced such incidents of negativity while on these platforms may be a more appropriate choice, or someone with a large social media following and who is trusted amongst their community (e.g., celebrities, community leaders, influencers, etc.). Alternatively, a collaborative approach could be pursued, with joint messages put forth.



Perceived connection and relatability are key to influence and persuasion, as often demonstrated by the parasocial relationships people form with celebrities and other popular figures. Capitalizing on these bonds could help us communicate pertinent information more effectively and make otherwise unappealing information more captivating.

Concluding Thoughts

Taken together, psychologists must recognize the key role they play in the infodemic we currently face and take active steps to promote accurate, scientific information while working tirelessly to combat potentially harmful and inaccurate information. While we have discussed three broad areas for consideration, it is important to remember that communication is a highly dynamic process that requires us to adapt and grow as our social and cultural environments shift.



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