

Working with the media can be beneficial but linking to and citing your research should be compulsory

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/11/28/working-with-the-media-can-be-beneficial-but-linking-to-and-citing-your-research/

11/28/2016

*It's great when academic research is covered by the media but too often this coverage fails to link back to or properly cite the research itself. It's time academics insisted on this and **Andy Tattersall** outlines the benefits of doing so. As well as pointing more people to your work, the use of identifiers allows you to track this attention and scrutinise where and how your research has been used. At a time when academic work is vulnerable to misreporting, such a simple step can help ensure the public are able to view original research for themselves.*



Academics are increasingly being sold the benefits of working with the media as an effective way of gaining impact and presenting their work to a wider audience. Yet all too often media coverage of research has no direct link to the research it is referring to. The general public are used to seeing news stories that say 'researchers have found' or 'researchers from the university of' yet these [reports](#) are often lacking when it comes to linking to or citing the actual research. Academics dealing with the media should make a point of insisting on linking to their original research outputs where applicable as there are several benefits. Given that Oxford Dictionaries just named '[post-truth](#)' as their word of 2016, we need to do everything we can to ensure fact retains its importance in the reporting of research.

Allow the public to see for themselves what the researchers found

How research is framed in the media can be very important as not all research is reported accurately. Giving links so that readers can fact-check is almost effortless if the corresponding academic insists on this at the point of writing the story. Of course this depends on how accessible the research is but there should be a link to the open access version or at the very least the abstract of the research. Certain national newspapers are very good at cherry-picking parts from a piece of research to provide an attention-grabbing headline. This can be extremely problematic in the reporting of health news and websites such as the NHS' [Behind the Headlines](#) addresses misreporting of health news stories. The problem is that most people reading the news are not aware of such resources, but adding the original link to the research in the hypertext or as a reference at the end of the paper copy gives readers direct access to the published work. Of course that does not mean they will read the original work, but it does open up the possibility. It also saves interested parties from trying to track down the original paper, the title of which is rarely reported in full, so what is lost by adding the links to the research? Remember, it is much harder for a journalist to misreport your work if you insist on linking to what you actually wrote.



Image credit: [Newspaper Stand](#) by Yukiko Matsuoka. This work is licensed under aCC BY 2.0 license.

Track mentions of your research

Tools such as Altmetric.com, Kudos and ImpactStory use unique identifiers to track the attention a piece of published research receives. So when someone publishes a peer-reviewed research article it receives a digital object identifier (DOI), or it could be a PubMed ID, ISBN, or other such identifier. If a piece of research is covered in the media and there is no link to the research via these identifiers it can miss out on being picked up by altmetric tools. The researchers may know about this coverage, and perhaps their institution's media team might too, but what about departmental peers, managers, colleagues in the research office or library? What about the funders? All of these are interested parties and coverage in the media, whether this is a specialist research blog or an international publication, is worthy of attention, especially when we are trying to capture that elusive 'impact'.

Follow the long tail of your scholarly communications

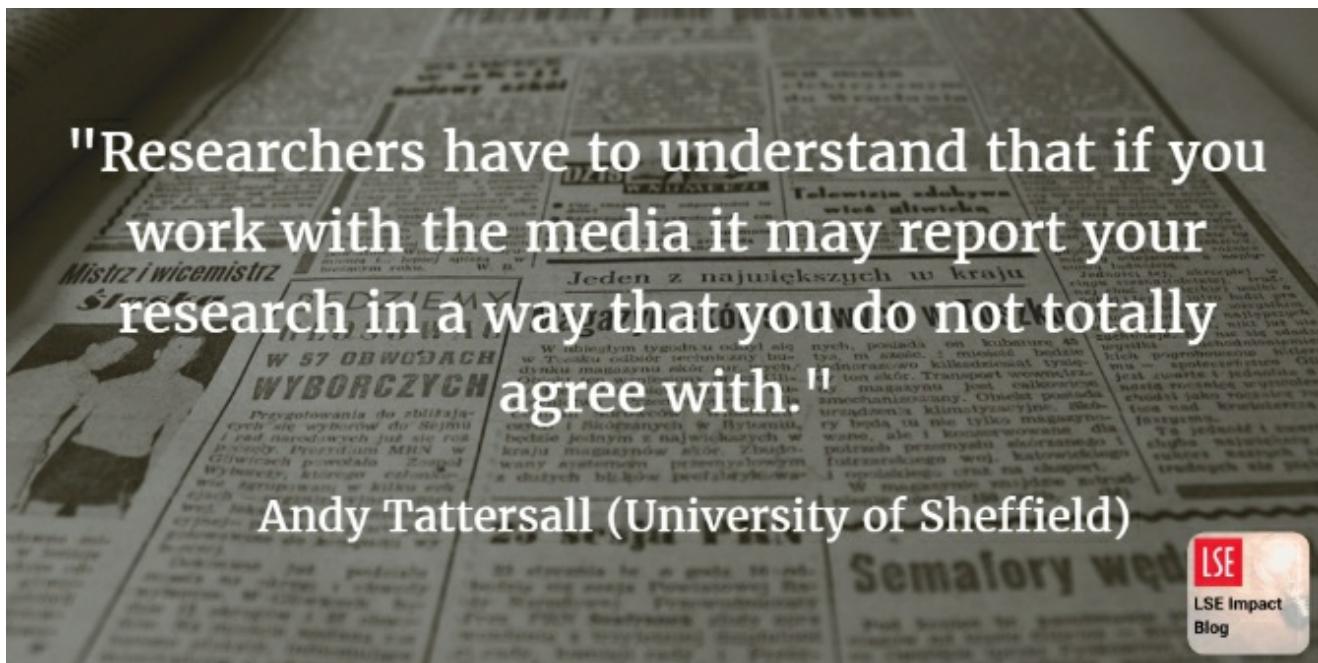
If you are a researcher working with the media to help disseminate your findings then it is presumable that you would be interested in how that research is being covered. With many online media platforms, whether blogs or news sites, it is common for an article to be republished elsewhere. If your work is covered on one media platform it might be picked up and published on another, and that second platform may carry more influence than the first. The problem is this: how do you know this has happened if there is no way of tracking back? Of course you might find your work covered on the web by carrying out a search, but that is hardly scientific. By insisting on linked DOIs or similar recognised identifiers then you should be able to discover where your news coverage has been republished using tools like Altmetric.com. In addition it allows you to discover how third party websites may have interpreted your research. You may not be interested in whether your research has been covered in the media, but I guarantee you would be if it was widely misreported.

Question the journalist's motives

We cannot expect everyone who reads about [published research](#) in the media to fully understand what it might mean. That is why the media writes in such a way as to break down the scholarly communication into easier-to-read lay summaries. Yet researchers have to understand that if you work with the media it may report your research in a

way that you do not totally agree with. Journalists may focus on one part of your research in particular, they may even be critical of it, and how they form the story may depend on their platform's agenda, editor or owner. This problem is exacerbated by social media; the general population can now publicly comment on news stories and so potentially perpetuate the bias reported by inaccuracies in the original news story. The tone and angle applied by a journalist to a news story can potentially be addressed if links to the original research and lay summary are added to the news article.

If a journalist or news site is unwilling to link to your published research then you have to ask the question: why? Are they looking to put their own slant on your work and if so are they in a position of expertise to do this? The chances are that most have not thought about adding links or references to your work – they may not appreciate that you, your organisation or funding body might be interested in tracking it for impact. (Of course this leads to other questions around whether you should be talking about your research in the first place, but that is a conversation between you, your manager and funder.) The only way to address this is to ensure that all communications about your research with journalists, bloggers and media organisations are on the caveat that they track back to your published work and that this work has a unique, recognised identifier.



What can researchers do?

Any academic knows that to cite another's work in their own outputs they must cite it in the body text and add a reference to the research pointing readers to this supporting work. Students are taught this as being part and parcel of the process of conducting research. So it should follow that anyone dealing with the media should insist that their work is correctly cited and linked back to once online. Not only does this linking aid interested members of the general population find the research for themselves but also peers, research groups and bodies as well as other journalists and people working in the media.

You may not always be able to control how your research is reported in the media and how the general public talk about it, but you can do more to ensure readers get better access to the actual research. In addition you can do more to ensure that media coverage is picked up by altmetric platforms that will help build a picture of where your research is being discussed. Working with the media is a very valuable and rewarding opportunity to disseminate your research to wider audiences. By adding the checks and balances with links and references you ensure you get to see the long tail of conversation that takes place afterwards. A conversation that you will also be able to engage with and possibly benefit from.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the author

Andy Tattersall is an Information Specialist at the School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR) and writes, teaches and gives talks about digital academia, technology, scholarly communications, open research, web and information science, apps, altmetrics and social media. In particular, how these are applied to research, teaching, learning, knowledge management and collaboration. Andy is a member of the University of Sheffield's Teaching Senate and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. He was the person who sparked interest in running the first MOOCs at his institution in 2013. Andy is also Secretary for the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals – Multi Media and Information Technology Committee. He has edited a book on *Altmetrics for Facet Publishing* which is aimed at researchers and librarians. He tweets [@Andy_Tattersall](#) and his ORCID ID is [0000-0002-2842-9576](#).

- Copyright © The Author (or The Authors) - Unless otherwise stated, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Unported 3.0 License.