From idea to impact: Sharing your work and getting it noticed

Andrew Lane

University of Wolverhampton
United Kingdom

Correspondence: a.m.lane2@wlv.ac.uk

Academics wish people to see their work. They want their work to have value in their respective academic discipline, for it to be noticed and if appropriate, make a meaningful difference to the quality of people's life. How work is valued by people varies between subject academic disciplines. For a discipline such as sport psychology, it is possible for work to have a direct benefit to the popular. The traditional approach is to publish work in peer refereed academic journals, where the steer is that the higher the impact factor, the better. An impact factor is after all an indication of engagement with work from the journal and thus, to some degree, such an argument makes sense. However, it has been difficult for academics to share their results and findings with the likely users of that work. It is not that easy to access academic journals, which are typically housed in a university library and online; only the abstract can be accessed without cost. However, recent developments has seen the rise of open access journals, some like *Psychreg Journal of Psychology* (PJP), are open access and free to publish (I take objection to journals that charge authors to publish, but ask reviewers to review for free), and via social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc), a means to share materials to potentially large audience.

What I discuss in this article is work done regarding promoting my own work for consumption by the general public in applied sport psychology. I outline a high-profile project we did working with the BBC Lab UK where, in Olympic year in the UK (BBC, 2012) we developed project that tested the benefits of engaging in sport psychology training to the masses. The notion that sports competition involves managing pressure and that athletes learn psychological skills that make them good at handling pressure is commonly known. Sport offers periodic times when where people not only take sporting outcomes seriously but also sport psychology as a serious academic discipline. The London 2012 Olympics offered such an opportunity. It is worth noting that a similar opportunity presents itself when

the England football team participate in a World Cup and consequently, opportunities for public dissemination arise (e.g. Goal, 2014). From this I go on to reflect on skills learned. I argue that dissemination of work to a mass audience is achievable via use of social media such as Twitter, where it is possible to reach large audiences relatively easily and do so with minimum technology.

Our work with BBC Lab UK (BBC, 2012a; Lane et al., 2016) where we developed an online project was a challenging but highly rewarding piece of work. BBC Lab UK encouraged us to be scientifically expansive and try to make full use of technology. Given the commonality and intensity of unpleasant emotions experienced before and during competition, and the value athletes ascribe to emotion regulation in their preparation, testing different interventions that purport to help emotional control and improve performance seemed logical (Lane et al., 2012). We designed and tested a relevant research question; can brief psychological training help perform better? And do emotions changed by using an intervention make a difference? When designing a BBC Lab UK project, you encouraged to think big, big in terms of sample size, an ambitious research question and to ensure the quality of experience for participants is high. Participants should find the work useful, learn something about them, and gain insightful feedback from their involvement. Previous BBC Lab UK projects such as *The Big Personality Test* (BBC, 2009) has been featured on national television. Our project was fronted by multi-medal winning runner Michael Johnson narrated film clips that introduced sections, delivered psychological skills training, and gave participants feedback.

Our project took a great deal of planning; planning a research question that had three different strategies (imagery, self-talk, and if-then planning) and four different foci – outcome goals, process goals, arousal regulation, and technical advice; giving 12 conditions, and with a control condition, where Michael gave encouragement to have another go. It was important to control for the belief effect that the intervention would work. We designed and built a performance task, which was a game where participants needed to find numbers in sequence from a mixed grid of 36 numbers. The competitive element was enhanced as players competed against a virtual opponent who was individualised by using their practice round data. Emotional images were flashed on the screen. Smiling faces were shown if you were ahead of your opponent, and sad or angry faces were displayed if you were behind your opponent. The project was accessible online only with participants getting feedback delivered on their test results. A great deal of the work was designing and proof testing the logic – for example, if you hit this button, what happens and planning each possible sequence. This was an extensive task - but the background logic was highly useful to learn. Feedback was organised into different videos where we explained the results, the concept and offered suggestions; these were pre-written scripts and so participants got personal coaching from Michael Johnson. Of course, that feedback had to be meaningful, useful and personal.

A powerful video featuring Michael Johnson (BBC, 2012b) was developed to promote the project. The project was launched on prime time television programme the *One Show* where Michael co-presented the project with comedian Ricky Gervais (pilkipediaTV, 2012). As indicator of the potential reach of online and engagement with mass media, over 20,000 participants engaged with the website on day 1. Over the course of the next few months, 74,000 different responses were collected. From these, 44,000 went forwards and while this seems a lot missing data, we needed the user to have listened to the interventions (and so we recorded if this happened – one benefit of online research is that it is possible to record all key strikes and so we gathered all the data). We knew if the computer had a sound card and passed the technical test.

We published the paper online via an open-access journal – open access was really important as it was consistent with the aim of the project to present sport psychology in a meaningful way to the general public. Since then, over 25,000 people have looked at the article (Lane et al., 2016). This is a huge number in comparison to other articles I have authored and as I am an editor and on the editorial board for a couple of journals (and some with good impact factors), this outperforms even the best of them. As

an academic who wishes to disseminate, this is very pleasing. *BBC iWonder* made a user site to showcase the work via a dedicated page (Lane, 2016).

The BBC project was highly resourced and the download and viewing figures show that. However, other articles published in open access journals on interesting topics have also been highly read. Researchers wish people to read their work, for their work to have some influence so working on ways to do that is important. Our BBC Lab UK project was on a topic that courted public interest; doing a research project on emotions and offering the public a way to engage with sport psychology were well timed. Using this principle, it is possible to engage the public and offer findings for their interest. Social media offers a relatively straightforward way of doing this.

My view is that researchers take some responsibility for this work and can be effective with minimal resources. Over the past few years I have also been using Twitter and other social media platforms to showcase work and getting some good viewing figures. For example, my Twitter post can receive 15,000 impressions and this is not because I have a large following. Twitter allows you to share your work with a large audience and by taking lessons learned from the BBC project of a.) writing the work in everyday language; b.) and making the information as practically relevant as possible; and, c.) make use of large audiences. Twitter does that easily – our work in the fatigue and the London Marathon in the weeks leading up to the run is well received. The London marathon, communities such as *Marathon Talk,* and *UKRunchat* will retweet your work if they find it interesting; and their engagement with your tweet is not based on your qualifications, publications, etc., but on whether what you have produced will make sense to the audience. The question their editor wishes to answer is whether the audience will find it useful. Getting into the mind of the user is important; seeing issues form their perspective is crucial and so writing the work with them in mind has to be the starting point.

A key point stemming from these developments is that researchers can make their work available to potential users of the research. The research needs have agency that he can do this task and build planning into the lifecycle of the work. Social media is a gateway to a wider audience. In terms of resources needed, these do not need to be extensive or expensive. For example, many academics use PowerPoint and putting your work to a single PowerPoint slide (and use a large font and picture) and then saving it as a picture file (a save as option in the software) allows you to attach a picture in Twitter; picture post on Twitter get greater exposure than text (I learned this information from a lecture by Professor Greg Whyte [Qubit, 2015] where he explained the value of taking a photographer on *Comic Relief* challenges such as the Davina McCall challenge where photo tweets associate with £250k of funds). Many academics have a fall back argument that they do not understand Twitter. While I admittedly am not a computer wizard, I find it possible to work how and what to do via trial and error, and the programs are set up so that you do learn this way. Most phones work on this basis – if you cannot use it without minimal instruction, this is a recipe for the phone not selling well.

We were using simple YouTube video clips, which are not expensive to make to tell people about our research. For example, we are interested in research into the effects of psychological skills training on managing fatigue and unpleasant emotions during running and cycling. We packed up our interventions in short help films. For example, we developed interventions to encourage process focus goals for running (University of Wolverhampton, 2017a) and cycling (University of Wolverhampton, 2017b). Given the popularity of indoor cycling (e.g., Zwift.com) we used graphics to product a training video to help build mental strength. Through simple survey methods such as Survey Monkey, we are able to gain feedback on these interventions. Through the use online lectures delivered via twitter, we can disseminate and discuss with large audiences. For example in the week of the *London Marathon* we ran workshops for runners (Lane, 2018). The methods replicated what we did with the BBC project in that we are providing instruction via video, and engagement via responses to self-report measures.

I argue that online and open access journals offer a route to engage with many audiences. One reason I am happy to work with journals such as PJP is that it offers a way to disseminate work. It has different types of outputs including blogposts and podcasts. I do not judge which journal to submit to by its relative impact factor but a match between the content and range of audiences. As most of my work has an applied value, the translation to the wider audience is considered.

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