

# Juicy morsels to be shared

Lucy Maddox on the benefits of tweeting, blogging and podcasting

Print media is one way to communicate psychological ideas, but increasingly psychologists are using internet-based media to reach a wider audience. What are the pros and cons for psychologists of using Twitter, blogging and podcasting to share their ideas? And what top tips are there? I did some sniffing around to find out.

I started with Twitter. I have only posted one tweet, which I believe makes me a 'Twitter lurker'. Twitter lets you write short (140 characters) 'bursts of information' and post them instantly for people to read. In turn you can read the 'tweets' of others (including @psychmag and @researchdigest), choosing who you 'follow' in your 'twitter feed'.

If nothing else, tweeting hones your ability to get right to the nub of whatever research or story you are tweeting about. It also provides another platform to get your ideas out there and noticed. You never know who might be following you. This is may be the downside too: it seems easy to get lulled into tweeting about

your breakfast without realising that this is a public interface.

Good tweets tend to hook you into a story, and give you a personal perspective, not just a dry bit of information. They have to be snappy and still contain some interesting and relevant content. The best psychologists on Twitter pick up interesting ideas and research and present a gobblet of it to hook you in, e.g. Richard Wiseman, Vaughan Bell, Sophie Scott. Psychology stories also pop up in tweets from general publications, e.g. *New Scientist*. For tweeting psychologists, see the BPS Research Digest list at [tinyurl.com/psychtweet2](http://tinyurl.com/psychtweet2)

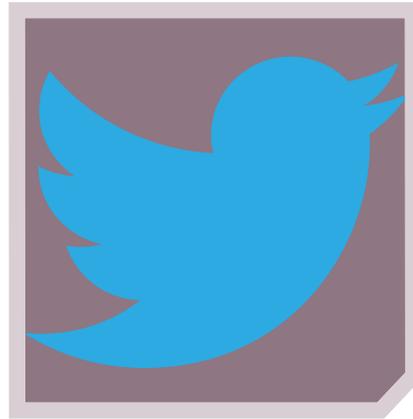
I also turned to the Research Digest to ask its very own prize-winning journalist, Dr Christian Jarrett, for his views on blogging. Blogs are internet-based public journals, usually with links to other sites. Blogging can be spun to reflect whichever field you are working in. Christian explained: 'Blogging allows psychologists to connect with interested readers outside of the psychological community, helping to correct misconceptions about what exactly psychology is and what psychologists do. It can also give psychologists a fresh perspective on their work, which might provide a creative spark. In turn, feedback from readers can inform psychologists, alerting them to the wider public's concerns and passions and beliefs.' Psychologists can read your blog

too: 'The peer-review process can continue to play... and it can be especially insightful to attract the views of psychologists who aren't in one's own subfield.'

The only downside for Christian was time: 'Blogging and social networking can be rather addictive and time-consuming. If you're going to start devoting time to these activities, you have to be realistic and recognise that that time is going to be taken away from something you do now. So, what are you going to do less of, if you're planning to start blogging and tweeting regularly?'

I asked Christian for his view on what

makes a good blog. 'People will always enjoy great writing, being entertained and informed. But you don't have to be a brilliant writer to produce a brilliant blog. You can use your expertise and experience as a psychologist to offer readers a distinctive take on a topic, be that a new piece of research, a dilemma or conundrum you're facing at work, a political controversy that's in the news, or whatever else you



Twweeting hones your ability to get right to the nub of a story

feel like writing about.'

Christian's advice for any would-be bloggers is to 'start reading other people's blogs to get ideas and then dive in. You'll soon find your own style and approach. Anyone can set up a blog for free via Blogger or Wordpress or many other platforms.' One of Christian's favourite blogs is from Oxford psychologist Professor Dorothy Bishop (see <http://deevybee.blogspot.co.uk>), which he described as 'a great example of a psychologist using their expertise and experience to inform, entertain and share opinions'.

Often an audio extension of blogging, podcasting is a series of audio files available on the web to be downloaded and listened to, like your own mini-radio series. Podcasts give you the freedom to listen to them whenever you like and they feel like someone is talking just to you. There are some excellent psychology podcasts, including *The Digital Human* from BBC Radio 4 (see opposite). The Institute of Psychiatry regularly podcasts its Maudsley debates, so even if you can't attend you can hear the psychological bunfights. A particularly juicy example of

## MEDIA PRIME CUTS

Philip Zimbardo spoke at TED about 'the demise of guys'. Science writer Carl Zimmer was not impressed.

<http://t.co/qnoiFQ10>

Psychologist @garymarcus says it's never too late to learn a musical instrument

<http://t.co/chRbltU7>

Charles S. Myers and shell-shock

<http://t.co/qfue0H06>

The dangers of British journalists 'having a laugh' with science <http://t.co/AbhLLvMJ>

What can we do about student e-mails?

<http://t.co/e0A6fxDJ>

Genius networks <http://t.co/KAevl7pt>

contribute

The Media page is coordinated by the Society's Media and Press Committee, with the aim of

promoting and discussing psychology in the media. If you would like to contribute, please contact the 'Media'

page coordinating editor, Ceri Parsons (Chair, Media and Press Committee), on [c.parsons@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:c.parsons@staffs.ac.uk)

this was the recent debate on CBT versus psychoanalysis (reviewed in the April issue), featuring Paul Salkovskis and Peter Fonagy ([tinyurl.com/d9v9e2x](http://tinyurl.com/d9v9e2x)). Psychology comes into non-psychology specific podcasts too, e.g. the engaging Radiolab ([www.radiolab.org](http://www.radiolab.org)) For more podcasts see [tinyurl.com/psychpodcasts](http://tinyurl.com/psychpodcasts) – another list curated by the Society's Research Digest.

Richard Scrase is an online producer who works at Understanding Animal Research and regularly runs courses to help scientists engage with the media using podcasting. I went to a course he ran recently and can recommend it (contact him at [www.scrase.eu](http://www.scrase.eu)). I asked Richard about his views on podcasting for psychologists. 'I can see several benefits', he said. 'Firstly, it's like an audio-visual CV, if you like... sometimes when broadcast media are looking to find a suitable person they want to see and/or hear a person first. Secondly, if you need to do some teaching or training or both, sometimes the discipline associated with making an audioslide presentation is quite good for ordering your thoughts. And thirdly, the process of using your ears to think can make you creative in a different way. It can be refreshing... get you out of a rut.'

However, Richard cautioned that 'It's not some kind of magic bullet. To do a decent job is time-consuming.' Richard recommended tailoring your presentation to the information you are presenting, not trying to present complex data without some visual cues for example. His top tips were: 'Don't be put off just because you haven't got the best gear or you haven't done it before. Have a go. Get your recording device close to the person's mouth. Wear headphones so you can hear what the recorder is hearing.' Richard also recommended using interviews: 'Interviews work well, not one person droning on.'

Ultimately, as with print, content counts. Irrelevant tweets or speechifying podcast monologues do not enrich your audience's psychological understanding, or expand your own ideas. If you do it well though, internet-based media can give you access to a wider population of people, and the relationship can be mutually beneficial. Creating a good regular blog or podcast takes more time than putting pen to paper. But keeping up to date with other psychologists' research is less time-consuming, and nearly invaluable as a ready resource of interesting ideas to nurture your knowledge. Whether you are a voyeur or an active participant, there are juicy morsels to be shared.

# The Digital Human

When a British newspaper picked up on the Twitter stream of Dr Aleks Krotoski, social psychologist and technology journalist, they described it as 'disjointed'. Krotoski began to receive concerned messages from followers asking if she was OK, and she realised that there was a danger of too much self-expression in her digital world. Who has control of who we are, when we go online? What are the psychological implications of the urge many now have to capture every image, experience and feeling for online eternity? More broadly, how has the internet changed our lives? And just as importantly, how has our essential being remained untouched by the dizzying technological advances?

In a series on BBC Radio 4, *The Digital Human*, Krotoski tackled these questions and dozens more in a way that was far from 'disjointed'. In fact, this was a *tour de force* in writing, production and presenting.

The first episode, 'Capture', asked what the deluge of images from digital photography means for our memory when every second can be recorded, edited and posted online for posterity. The psychological content was to the fore: the first example of 'homo digitas' Krotoski met was Dr Charles Fernyhough (University of Durham), who talked about using the SenseCam with his son to see the world from his point of view and discover whether the device is an effective cue to memory.

In the second episode, 'Control', we heard from psychologist Professor Sherry Turkle (MIT) about the 'multiplication of selves' that is now possible online, and the 'continual need for performance' this can bring. 'Conceal' featured a great section with Anja Steinbauer (London School of Philosophy) on Jeremy Bentham's 'panopticon' as it applies to the internet. Other episodes kept up the high standard. 'Conviction' dealt with technology as a 'force multiplier for religions'; 'Crush', explored love online, featuring Dr Qazi Rahman (Queen Mary, University of London); 'Crowded' talked with Professor Steve Reicher (University of St Andrews) about the power of the crowd; and the final episode, 'Chance', about serendipitous encounters.

To me, the series was a masterclass in so many tricky aspects of communicating psychology and science in general, and

producing a radio series/podcast. The way Krotoski blended examples from her own life, allowing her personality to come through without it overshadowing the topic; the breadth of interviewees; even the choice of background music (from producer Victoria MacArthur).

Perhaps most impressive to me was the way the series dealt with debate and nuance. This can be phenomenally difficult in science communication, and we are often told that the audience want certainty not caveats. Applied to the digital world, this series could have become a victim of 'Greenfieldism',

stoking fears that the internet is 'rewiring our brains'. Not a bit of it: time and time again, grandiose statements and predictions were balanced by more prosaic views. This likely reflects Krotoski's own, evidence-based approach: 'It was the same with the telegraph, the telephone, the printing press, the automobile, the

television – people always throw up their hands and say "Oh my God", but really what these things are doing is expressing who we are at a certain point in time.' Series producer Peter McManus was quoted in *The Telegraph* as saying 'We want to go beyond either moral panic or wide-eyed, fanboy admiration. It's time for something more mature.'

Job done. I'm not easily impressed, but this was radio – and inter-disciplinary psychology – at its very best. Listen at [www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/dh](http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/dh) and keep your ears open for a second series later in the year. **JS**



Aleks Krotoski

## MEDIA PRIME CUTS

The trouble with brain scans, by @vaughanbell <http://t.co/OQpnRe0g>  
 Psychiatrist who championed 'gay cure' confesses <http://t.co/d1ZMSUWw>  
 Bruce Hood speaks <http://t.co/Q0v6OmlY>  
 Profile of Daryl Bem <http://t.co/9p9Y7MI5>  
 Professor Geoff Beattie on running, adultery and family <http://t.co/PjIBsqLr>  
 How does literature influence scientific thought and practice? <http://t.co/qlqLqfZB>