

ARTICLE

EHPS UN Grant Report: Conducting a science communication project on health psychology topics on Instagram

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Abstract

Science communication is essential for increasing the societal impact of health psychology research, yet translating academic findings into accessible and engaging content remains challenging. This report describes the planning, implementation, and evaluation of an EHPS UN-funded science communication project conducted on Instagram in collaboration with the In-Mind magazine. The project aimed to enhance public understanding of health psychology by communicating research on sleep, eating behavior, and health and risk communication through theme weeks on Instagram complemented by peer-reviewed In-Mind blog posts. Content creation followed evidence-based principles of effective science communication and incorporated interactive elements to foster engagement. Over a three-week implementation phase, the project reached 19,772 accounts, generated 714 content interactions, and attracted 453 new followers, indicating substantial increases compared to the previous month. Additionally, we received positive user feedback. Three key lessons emerged from this project: set realistic goals that align with available resources, adapt content to platform-specific characteristics, and gather feedback from both experts and lay audiences. Overall, the project demonstrates the feasibility and impact of strategic, collaboration-based science communication in health psychology.

Key words: Science communication, Social media, Instagram, Public engagement

The communication of health psychology research to the general public is essential to increase its societal impact. However, translating academic findings into engaging and accessible content presents both opportunities and challenges (Genschow et al., 2023; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), 2017; Rosman et al., 2025). In this article, we outline the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a science communication project about health psychology. We highlight the benefits of this project as well as the challenges we faced, and share lessons learned that may inform future projects.

The idea for this project arose when we participated in the Collaborative Research and Training in the EHPS (CREATE) workshop entitled “Communicating health psychology research to lay audiences” that took place prior to the EHPS Conference 2023 in Bremen. As reflected in the July 2024 issue of EHP by our peers Bösch and Edgren (2024), the facilitators Prof. Dr. Laura König and Dr. Heide Busse, provided early career researchers with theoretical and empirical background on science communication. Moreover, the activities within the workshop promoted practical skills and inspired participants to conceptualize their own science communication projects. A funding opportunity provided by the EHPS UN Committee further motivated the implementation of these projects.

Over the course of the workshop, participants developed initial project ideas and built collaborations. Our first ideas ranged from debunking health myths on TikTok to creating a website with interactive quizzes on health psychology topics. After the workshop, we reflected on available resources and possible barriers. As resources, we considered prior knowledge (“In which areas do we already have extensive knowledge?”), personal interests (“Which topics are we interested in?”), skills (“Which platforms are we already familiar with?”), and potential partnerships (“Who can support our project?”). As the main barrier, we identified the time available for the project (“How much time do we want to invest in this project?”). To draw upon the available resources, we decided to pursue topics where we have extensive knowledge and that interest us. Specifically, we chose to address the respective research areas of our PhDs, namely sleep (Liesemarie), eating behavior (Alice), and health and risk communication (Rebecca). Furthermore, we selected Instagram as a platform, given our familiarity with communicating there. Moreover, two of our team members are part of the social media team of *The Inquisitive Mind* (In-Mind) Germany (<https://de.in-mind.org/>), which enabled us to form a partnership with experienced science communicators. In-Mind is a peer-reviewed online magazine and a platform where scientists communicate psychological research to both academic and non-academic audiences. It publishes articles, blog posts, book reviews, and interviews, and shares current psychological insights with followers on social media, including Instagram. Through the collaboration, we had the opportunity to use an established Instagram account for our science communication project, allowing us to reach a broader audience. Accordingly, our final project idea, which we consecutively refined, was to communicate health psychology research through engaging posts on the social media platform Instagram.

During the application process for the EHPS-UN grant, we outlined our project goal, target audience, communication channel, specific content ideas, budget justification, and a one-year project timeline. Specifically, our goal was to enhance understanding and challenge misconceptions about health psychology topics and foster interest in the field by communicating research findings on three specific topics (sleep, eating behavior, and health and risk communication) via the In-Mind Instagram account. We planned

to use the funding for a Canva Pro subscription (<https://www.canva.com/>) to create professional and appealing posts, as well as to promote the Instagram content.

After the grant was approved, the project evolved in three phases: (1) content creation, (2) implementation, and (3) evaluation.

1. Content creation

During content creation, we conceptualized content for three theme weeks about our personal research areas as well as a short introduction to health psychology in general. During this phase, we incorporated scientifically-based principles for effective science communication (see König et al., 2025), such as carefully structuring texts, avoiding jargon, and including citations. Furthermore, we designed the content with the intention of enhancing engagement by including interactive elements such as quizzes, open-ended questions, and polls. We used the Canva Pro account to facilitate the transformation of our content into visually appealing Instagram slides (see Figure 1 for examples, Lipkus et al., 2001). Additionally, we authored blog articles on the In-Mind blog which offered further insight on specific topics to complement our communication efforts on Instagram. These included bedtime procrastination (Albers, 2024), social influences on eating behavior (Seffen, 2024), and the anecdotal bias in the medical context (Blase, 2024). To assure quality, the blog articles underwent In-Mind's peer review process. Regarding our Instagram posts, we implemented multiple feedback loops within our team and worked closely with science communication experts from the In-Mind social media team, as well as with Prof. Dr. Laura König, who supervised the project. Importantly, we also asked non-experts (friends and family) to provide feedback on the planned posts.

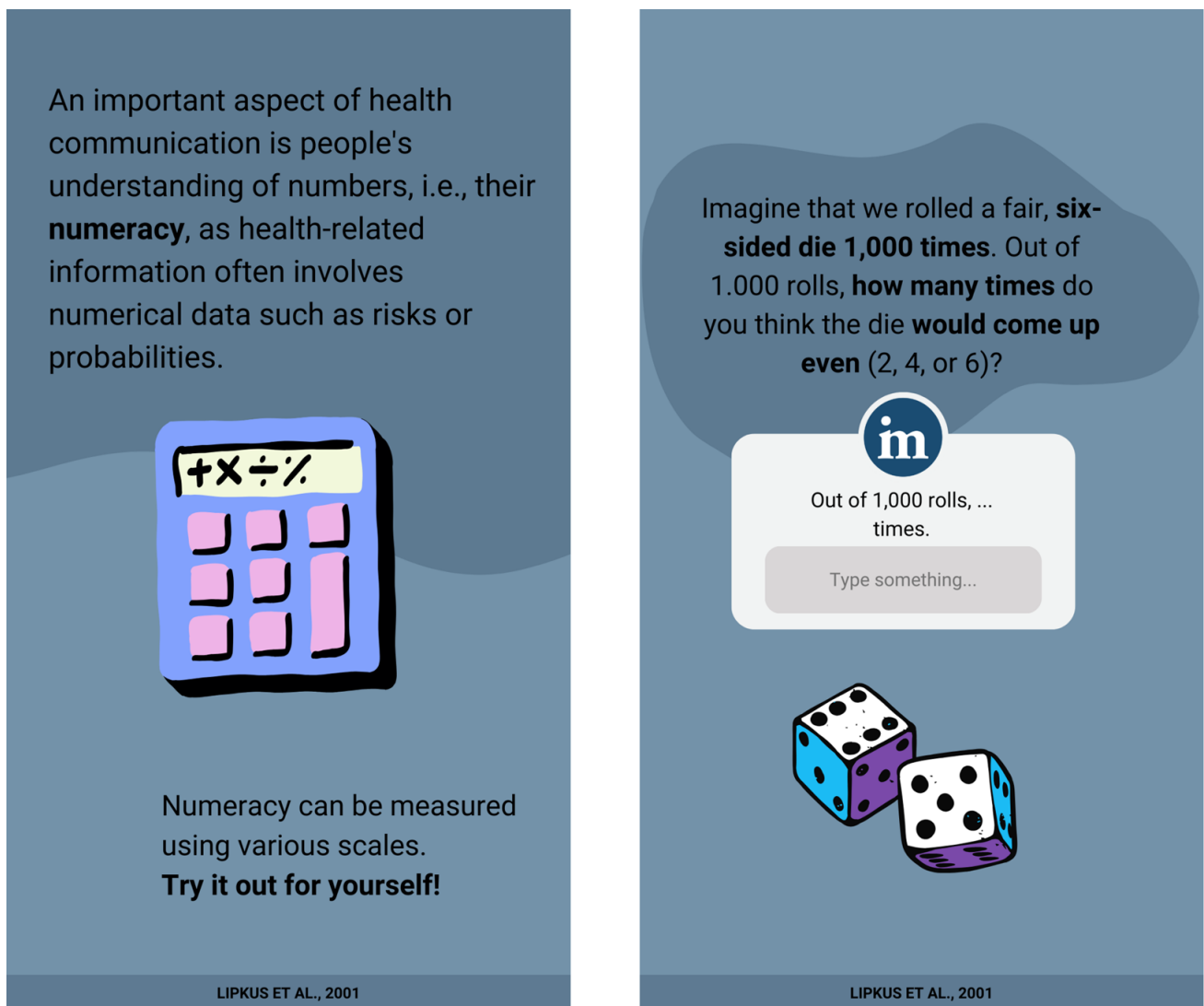


Fig. 1. Examples of Instagram Story slides explaining the concept of numeracy. The slides shown were presented one at a time and were translated from the original German version. The text box uses an item of the numeracy scale and the correct answer ("In about 500 out of 1,000 rolls") was shown in the following slide.

2. Implementation

The implementation phase lasted for a total of three weeks and two days. On June 28, 2025, we started by posting introductory stories on Instagram, which presented health psychology as a research field and prepared followers for the upcoming three theme weeks. The first theme week, led by Rebecca, focused on health and risk communication, followed by Alice's week on eating behavior

and Liesemarie's week on sleep. Each theme week involved posting daily Instagram stories (see Figure 1 for examples, Lipkus et al., 2001) and monitoring the feedback from viewers, for instance, by collecting answers to free text entry boxes. Furthermore, each theme week included a feed post about our In-Mind blog articles which explored specific topics in more depth. Where available, we also referenced preexisting In-Mind feed posts to enhance content integration. To maximize reach, we developed a promotion strategy for our posts. Specifically, we promoted each of the three feed posts as well as one story per day. Since Instagram does not allow the promotion of stories with interactive elements, we selected the most visually engaging non-interactive story each day for promotion. We set "more profile visits" as the promotion goal (as opposed to "more website visits" or "more messages"), ensuring that users were directed to the In-Mind Instagram profile upon clicking the advertisement. Overall, this phase of the project was the most fun and rewarding part.

3. Evaluation

The evaluation of the project took place during and after implementation. As indicators of reach, we reviewed the data which is routinely collected on the professional dashboard (Instagram Business Team, 2021), such as numbers of reached accounts, followers and content interactions (including likes) compared to the previous month. These showed that during our theme weeks, we reached 19,772 accounts (increase of 2.9K% compared to the previous month), recorded 714 content interactions (increase of 3.1K% compared to the previous month) and gained 453 new followers (increase of 1.7K% compared to the previous month). In addition, we included the possibility for direct feedback within the Instagram stories at the end of each theme week. Viewers could indicate how much they liked the previous week as well as specify what they liked most and where they saw room for improvement. In total, we received very positive feedback from Instagram users. Most users rated the theme weeks as very enjoyable. Positive comments included that the topics were discussed from different perspectives. One user's suggestion was to have less text on the slides as this would be a more pleasant reading experience.

We learned three major lessons from the project, which are likely also useful for future science communication projects. First, **set a realistic project goal**. Considering that science communication often takes place alongside day-to-day academic work, and that lack of time is reported as one of the main barriers to engaging in science communication by researchers (Genschow et al., 2023; Society, 2006), it is essential to consider in advance how much time and effort you are able to spend on a project. Therefore, you may try to create synergies between the project and your current knowledge, interests, skills or other ongoing and established projects. Personally, we found it easier to communicate about topics that we are already familiar with as well as passionate about. Furthermore, we greatly benefited from the cooperation with the In-Mind blog and Instagram account in terms of existing infrastructure and reach. Therefore, we recommend to use existing mediums or accounts instead of creating new ones, at least to get started with science communication or for temporary projects.

Second, **consider the specific characteristics of your medium**. In our case, this was Instagram. As Instagram is a visual platform, including images and visuals is particularly important, while avoiding too much text on a slide. Additionally, creating possibilities for interaction was beneficial to promote active engagement and deeper reflection. However, in our project, open-ended questions were rarely answered. Therefore, simple formats such as sliders, multiple choice questions or quizzes should be preferred. Generally, it is important to consider platform-specific length and format limitations. For instance, Instagram posts are limited to 20 slides with different preset measurements while Instagram Stories should have an aspect ratio of 9:16. Graphics tools, such as Canva or Adobe (<https://www.adobe.com/express/create/post/instagram>), facilitate content creation in line with such format guidelines. Another important aspect to consider is the timing of posts. During our project implementation, this was challenging at times, and we might have benefited from the use of tools for managing social media posts. These can suggest posting times based on follower activity, automatize posting, and facilitate cross-posting on multiple platforms if desired. Examples for such tools are planable (<https://planable.io/>) or the meta business suite (<https://creators.facebook.com/tools/meta-business-suite/>). Overall, the promotion of posts on Instagram was successful for increasing reach. Regarding the promotion of science communication on Instagram, the first step is to define your advertising goal. For example, promoting specific science communication posts might warrant a different strategy than promoting your overall platform. It is also important to contemplate which posts are most likely to spark interest and increase reach. From our experience, some posts were more successful at generating engagement than others.

Third, **gather feedback from multiple perspectives**. Our cooperation with In-Mind had the added benefit that we could collect a lot of feedback from science communication experts. However, don't forget to ask your target group for feedback. In our case, this could be easily done by asking friends and family whether they understand the content, find it visually appealing as well as interesting. Sometimes, it was only through this feedback that we realized certain contexts or words were not as easily understood by the general public although they seemed clear to us. We therefore advise to gather feedback from multiple sources within and outside the research community on all aspects of your project such as content, comprehensibility, correctness, and design.

Overall, we are delighted to have completed this science communication project and would like to thank the EHPS UN committee as well as Prof. Dr. Laura König and the InMind team for their support. It was a rewarding experience to make the topics we typically engage with at an academic level accessible, interesting, and engaging for a broader audience while considering the unique characteristics of the medium we chose. We aim to continue and further strengthen our commitment to science communication in the future, for example, by presenting new and intriguing scientific findings through InMind articles and explore interactive ways to promote them on Instagram. In addition, we believe that this experience—breaking down complex content into a few key findings and presenting them in a clear yet nuanced way—will enhance our scientific writing and presentation skills as well. While the target audience for this project was the general public, the principles of science communication are also valuable for effective communication *within* the scientific community.

Science communication plays a crucial role in making scientific knowledge accessible and understandable to the general public (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), 2017; Rosman et al., 2025). This is relevant for health psychology in particular given that it deals with applied topics such as perceptions, determinants, prevention and modification of health behaviors, as well as coping with illness. Therefore, effectively conveying its findings can not only spark interest in the field and educate individuals about phenomena they encounter in their daily lives, but ideally also empower them to make more

informed health-related choices and adopt healthier lifestyles. We hope that this report encourages other researchers to get involved in science communication and that our insights inspire future projects.

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