

October 2019

“In April 2019, we submitted our abstract containing the results of our newest study, which we wanted to present at this year’s ECNP Congress in Copenhagen. A few weeks later, Tom Parkhill, the press officer of ECNP, contacted us and inquired about a possible press release of this work.

As the corresponding journal article was scheduled to be published on the same day as we presented the results in Copenhagen (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-49301-y>), the timing was perfect and Tom wrote a great press release with just minimal work on our side (less than five emails). We met at the ECNP press office at the Congress to finalize the press release, which lasted about 15 minutes. The final report could then be found [here](#). What happened in the next few weeks was astonishing. Over 200 articles were published in online blogs, specialized websites, but also in the online outlets of major news organizations like NBC News, Yahoo News or the New York Times. Articles were published all over the world including interview requests and articles from Malaysia, Italy, Poland, Australia and New Zealand. Online platforms like Twitter led to an astounding echo of this research and the feedback we have received since then was quite impressive.

Some challenges have to be admitted in this process. While many articles overexaggerated the impact of our results and overinterpreted some associations as causal, some articles were quite “creative” in their take on this study in ways that we do not support (<https://www.inc.com/eric-mack/a-shockingly-simple-2-minute-test-could-determine-who-sharpest-thinkers-are-in-a-group.html>). Moreover, some online comments under articles were quite worrisome, but unfortunately seem to be the new normal in online communication (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/02/well/move/being-young-active-and-physically-fit-may-be-very-good-for-your-brain.html#commentsContainer>). We were accused of being “racist” (“This article supports the specious belief that white matter is better than dark matter [...]”) and were accused of being paid by the fitness industry (“This scientific study brought to you by a scientist with ties to soul cycle”). We also appeared on websites from a famous US conspiracy theorist.

While this seems amusing to many, it raises a bigger point of the difficulties of communicating scientific research results to the public. Nonetheless, in our opinion, the raised public awareness for our study results outweigh by far the above mentioned downsides of a press release like this and we can only recommend working together with the ECNP press office to reach a broader nonscientific audience of your research.”

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