

INTERVIEW THE EXPERT

Expanding the Reach of Scientific Communication: Tools, Motivation, and Recommendations

Mandy Sha¹ 

¹ Research Scientist

Keywords: scientific communication, innovation, diversity, leadership, AAPOR, professional association

<https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2024-0032>

Survey Practice

Vol. 19 Special Issue, 2025

Researchers and research leaders are responsible for producing facts and they have a responsibility to make their message relevant and easy to understand for experts and non-experts. In this article, [Frauke Kreuter](#) and [Mandy Sha](#) discuss how to expand the reach of scientific messaging and generalize its usefulness. Frauke is a professor, podcaster, multiple award winner, and the current President of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). Mandy is a research leader with 25 years of professional experience in commercial and noncommercial sectors, as well as a university survey shop, and was recently recognized by AAPOR for her innovative leadership during the most uncertain period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, they discuss the tools, the motivation, and the recommendations to communicate scientific messages to diverse audiences and ultimately facilitate greater cross-cultural understanding.

Digital innovations, social media, and interdisciplinary exchanges have significantly shifted the economy of information dissemination. They present opportunities for researchers and research leaders to broaden scientific communication. Join Frauke Kreuter and Mandy Sha as they discuss sharing your gift of knowledge with diverse audiences and having fun doing it!

Mandy: Before we discuss how to expand the reach of scientific communication, what do you say to those who wonder: *Do we really need to generalize our message for the public?*

Frauke: The onus is on us to make our message more relevant and understandable. An analogy would be the practice of publishing and report writing. As researchers or research leaders, we train ourselves to take critiques of the papers and reports that we write so we can improve them. The mantra I go by and teach is this: *If you didn't understand what I write, it's because I didn't write it clearly enough.* For example, when you submit a research grant application, the evaluators are not always going to be people who have a deep understanding of your field. So, you must communicate what it is and what you want to do in a logical and concise way.

For your message to go far, you need to use clear language that diverse readers would appreciate, not just what you and people like you appreciate.

Frauke Kreuter

Mandy: Another example is when survey methodologists design questionnaires. We draft questions based on our professional training, experience, and best practices, yet we are often humbled to find out during pretesting that respondents have trouble with certain concepts, reference periods, or navigating the questions.

Frauke: And when respondents show signs of confusion, it is our job to fix the questions. We do not come up with excuses like: *Oh, the interviewer can just explain it.* We would never say: *Let's keep the questions complicated!* No, we look for ways to improve our work. The same goes with communicating scientific results for non-academic audiences.

Mandy: There are so many content creation tools these days to expand the reach of scientific communication: podcasts, short and long videos, blogs and social publishing, op-eds, open access journals and books, and various types of social media platforms. What lines of communication do you maintain or keep open to share research results?

Frauke: To start, I co-host a monthly podcast called [#DigDeep](#). Since 2016, we've produced about 150 episodes that covered the trends and impact of digitalization. Although the podcast is in German only, I expect that AI technologies will soon be able to translate it into the English language and probably in my own voice!

Mandy: There are many podcasts these days, but back in 2016, they were still relatively new. What motivated you to use podcasting as a line of scientific communication for experts and non-experts?

Frauke: At the time, another academic just started his podcast and I thought: *This could be fun.* My co-host is a friend who excels in the industry and is also an entrepreneur, and he just has such different perspectives on digitalization. I don't think of our podcast as a way for me to get my message out there. Rather, I think of it as where I get to learn new information and that's what makes it fun for me to keep creating content to share with the public.

I felt the same way with my [Coursera courses](#), which were offered more than 10 years ago when Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was not as well-established as today.

Mandy: Do you consider social media another useful vehicle to disseminate research results?

Frauke: It can be. I've been experimenting. Earlier this year, I did a series of LinkedIn posts providing general guidance on conducting research and running a research group. I didn't continue because they were my personal observations. I felt exposed and thinking about how others would react was sidetracking me.

I also wonder how deliberate I should be with my messaging: which platform to use, how often to post, the role to play as a scientist, head of a research lab, President of the [American Association for Public Opinion Research \(AAPOR\)](#), etc. Because you're curating what people see from you, and if I only make a few thoughts public, they become so dominant and then it is almost as if I'm not thinking about all these other things. It was creating a gap between my public life and my private life in a way that was disorienting for me. And once social media becomes choreographed, it takes away the fun for me.

Mandy: It can also become time-consuming because there are so many social media platforms and messaging requires tailoring to the platform to be effective. For example, on Medium you write longform but on [LinkedIn](#) your message should be pithier and more visual. It can get overwhelming, not to mention I've heard researchers or research leaders say they are "not good at marketing." What can they do to get their message out there?

Frauke: They can leverage professional associations. For example, AAPOR members can increase their visibility and the visibility of their work through AAPOR's infrastructure, which is supported by professional communications staff. We don't have to learn marketing all by ourselves!

Mandy: AAPOR has helped me communicate my messages and those messages that I care about in an expansive, deliberate fashion that I couldn't achieve in my own powers or time: the [Transparency Initiative](#), Webinars and [affinity group for cross-cultural and multilingual research](#), and open access *Survey Practice* journal and AAPOR task force reports, just to name a few.

Some of the AAPOR opportunities require that you be a recognized expert, but there are pathways for researchers and research leaders who are in early- or mid-careers. Check out these practical recommendations from my 2019 *Survey Practice* article [Professional Association and Pathways to Leadership in Our Profession!](#)

Mandy Sha

Frauke: I bet some people don't message at all because they feel like they have nothing to say. So, the first hurdle to overcome is to realize that you have something to share. And there is probably an audience out there for what you want to share.

When I did a semester visit at the Simons Institute for the Theory of Computing at Berkeley a few years ago, they asked me to give a talk on survey methodology and I thought: *These scientists are experts in computing, what do I have to offer them?* It turned out that while they are computing experts, they still need “translation” to understand data collection and the Total Survey Error (TSE) framework. They seemed to have enjoyed my talk. That made me realize that you shouldn’t assume people know what you know to be common knowledge. Value your knowledge!

Mandy: I love that! It’s self-advocacy.

Frauke: Whatever label you put on it, the first step is that you actively like what you do. And then you realize that others might like it, too, or others might like to know about what you do.

When I was working on my Ph.D., I had the idea to write a textbook [Data Analysis Using Stata](#) but people told me I should just focus on getting my Ph.D. I followed my interest, and the book became a good opener for my activities in the U.S. and is on its fourth edition this Fall.

Mandy: Another good example of self-advocacy.

Frauke: I want to point out that a more important consideration should be: *What is your communication goal?* For example, you can’t talk about data quality unless you know what you want to use the data for.

Also ask: *Why do you want to become a science influencer?* Knowing why we are doing what we’re doing and then honing in on doing more of whatever you define and enjoy.

Mandy: How do we clarify for ourselves what purposeful action we should take on social media or any other channels when it comes to scientific communication?

Frauke: Clarify the mission and vision. As an organization, AAPOR recently went through the exercise of creating [mission and vision statements](#). The exercise strengthened the sense of purpose for AAPOR, and I feel it’d be valuable for individuals as well. I’ve been trying to encourage my students to develop a personal tagline that describes what they do. You’d think it’s very easy to put together, but developing a meaningful tagline takes knowing yourself and your goals.

Mandy: It sounds like self-reflection and self-awareness precede self-advocacy.

Frauke: The reality is that resources are finite. Your time, energy, or network are not unlimited.

If you are not clear on your communication goal and your why, then it's just doing whichever idea you have first, and your first idea is not necessarily the best one.

For example, if my podcast co-host and I talk about whatever comes to our mind, then we are not serving our audience. And we are not having fun.

Mandy: I really like how you see what you do as “having fun” and you are open to innovative ideas. Is that an attitude that anyone can develop?

Frauke: For me, having collaborators encourages me to try new ideas. Otherwise, I might talk myself out of new ideas or make little progress on my own. So, you can try to develop an attitude of “having fun” by talking about ideas and seeing if you can convince others. It's a stimulating process.

Mandy: Frauke, you and I are both bilingual and bicultural. How has your background motivated you to make scientific communication more relevant and understandable?

Frauke: I've not necessarily made the connection, but I can see how being bilingual and bicultural are one of the reasons that I'm always interested in whether things can be seen from a different perspective. It's also because I've had constant practice. When I first moved to the U.S. in the early 2000's, I assumed I'd have to register my address with the government. In Germany, you are required to complete your Anmeldung (registration) to have proof of residence, and when you move, you de-register. So, I asked around for the registration office and no one knew what I was talking about! Today, I go back and forth between Germany and the U.S. and I discovered the fun in “translating” these differences. Even though German and American cultures are both Western, they are different in many ways.

Mandy: This is encouraging to hear you also consider that being bilingual and bicultural are an asset, not an impediment for researchers and research leaders who are “different.” A few years ago, I was part of a group discussion about how to handle the complaint of a peer. It was a difficult situation and virtually everyone around the table suggested coming up with new policies and reinterpreted rules to address the complaint. I recall I was the only one who spoke up: *Why can't we just talk directly with this person to resolve the issue?* My “different” worldview and entrepreneurial instinct provided an alternative solution that prioritizes empathy and communication.

Frauke: Broader scientific communication has a lot to do with sharing a different perspective. In the process of science, you adjust your perspective, and you are guaranteed to learn something new.

Mandy: This reminds me of another aspect of scientific communication: talking to people in different disciplines. Right now, disciplines such as statistics, computer science, psychology, sociology, economics, law, etc. are “talking” to each other, partly out of necessity. How do we share our message?

Frauke: The “cultural differences” among disciplines are huge, and it’s a big investment to collaborate and try to understand ideas in other fields. Having an openness to new cultures and settings and learning through osmosis (or machine learning as we would say these days!) help you understand how they think. Then you can see where your knowledge and what you do or know can be of service. Doing so requires the willingness to keep listening, keep talking, and keep (literally) sitting until you get to that point of interdisciplinary exchange.

Mandy: The *Survey Practice* journal exemplifies how research findings can be amplified and useful to practitioners. Its open-access e-journal format and the applied focus make the articles accessible and practical and this special issue centers cross-cultural and multilingual research for the journal. What more can and should we do to broaden the reach of cross-cultural and multilingual research?

Frauke: Like we talked about earlier, the first step is identifying your goal and your why so your actions align with what you want to achieve. To broaden the article’s reach, I think it would be helpful to have interactive text so readers can click on a word to see how it’s used in different disciplines or cultures. Kind of like a cheat sheet to “translate” concepts and words in the “language” all readers can understand. For example, when they talk about tables, they actually mean a histogram, or vice versa.

Early in my career, I observed a statistician. As he was introducing these latent variable models, he would say: *Oh, an economist would call this equation XYZ*. He continued to share the different words that people from different disciplines use. I found that fascinating!

Mandy: Me, too! In the U.S., “Asian” is a term that encompasses East, South, and Southeast Asians. So diverse cultures and languages of the Chinese, Korean, Indian, Pakistani, Vietnamese, and Filipinos are all referred to as Asians. But in many European countries, “Asian” usually describes South Asians only. Perhaps one day, e-journals will integrate the capabilities to “translate” concepts like these and they will surely facilitate greater cross-cultural understanding.

Let me summarize the three recommendations from our conversation today about communicating research results to diverse audiences:

1. **Self-reflection: Identify your goal and your why.**

2. **Self-awareness: Know what you are good at and enjoy doing.**
3. **Self-advocacy: Use content creation tools that feel authentic to you and leverage professional associations like AAPOR.**

And, very importantly, have fun!

.....

Acknowledgement

We thank *Survey Practice* Editor-in-Chief Eva Aizpurua for her support and encouragement.

Author Contact Information

Mandy Sha

mandysha.com

X: [@MMandySha](https://twitter.com/MMandySha)

LinkedIn: [@mandy-sha](https://www.linkedin.com/in/mandy-sha)

Submitted: December 06, 2024 EST. Accepted: December 07, 2024 EST. Published: March 02, 2025 EST.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Appendix. Interview Guide

Download: <https://www.surveypractice.org/article/127308-expanding-the-reach-of-scientific-communication-tools-motivation-and-recommendations/attachment/257539.pdf>
