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From Finding to Feed: Translating Empirical Research for Social Media

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Proposal Summary

Cognitive scientists spend much of their professional training learning how to explain empirical research to one another: in talks, papers, posters, grant proposals, and conference discussions. An integral part of our training is the communication and dissemination of scientific ideas at an expert level. Far less attention is given to translating that same work for communities beyond academia. This gap matters because cognitive science produces findings about learning, reasoning, attention, memory, communication, development, decision making, and human-technology interaction—topics that many members of the public already encounter in everyday life. Cognitive research is fascinating, relevant, and often meets urgent needs. Yet when research findings circulate without context, they can be misunderstood, oversimplified, or mistrusted. People may not trust what they cannot understand, and many misunderstandings begin at a basic level: what empirical research is or looks like, what evidence can show, and crucially, why scientific claims are often conditional and open to revision.

The goal of this beginner-friendly professional development workshop is to help cognitive scientists of all career levels translate empirical findings into clear, accurate, and engaging social media content for audiences beyond academia. It is designed for participants who already have some public-facing platform, even if it is only a landing-page website, a dormant LinkedIn profile, an unused Bluesky account, or an abandoned lab Instagram. Many scientists recognize social media as useful for networking and visibility, but outreach efforts often lose momentum because researchers are unsure how to turn papers and projects into coordinated written and visual content for lay audiences. This workshop starts from the premise that the first step of getting on social media is often already done. The next step often feels much more daunting: learning to use those platforms more intentionally.

Significance and Timeliness

This workshop responds to a need increasingly recognized across science. *Nature Medicine* has argued that researchers must reach beyond the walls of their labs and that graduate and postdoctoral training should prepare scientists to

communicate with audiences ranging from specialists to lay publics (“Scientists”, 2020). A recent *Nature* editorial similarly argues that public-facing science communication should preserve core features of research integrity, including the scientific process, uncertainty, and context (“Science communication”, 2024). These concerns are especially relevant online: *Science* editorials note that social media can introduce scientists directly to the public, but can also amplify cherry-picking, overstatement, algorithmic distortion, and misunderstanding (Brossard & Scheufele, 2022; Thorp, 2022). Yet scientists need the support of the public to continue to secure funding, attract new generations of curious students, and (in many cases) to recruit the participants that form the backbone of many of our studies (Fischhoff & Scheufele, 2013).

These broader concerns apply specifically to cognitive science as well. Public conversations about psychology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, and education can often be shaped by misinformation or simplified or over-generalized claims. These concerns are exacerbated by short-form content on social media, where 73% of adults said they had looked for news at some point in 2025 (St. Aubin & Liedke, 2025). Many steps in the cognitive science workflow are invisible (Girouard & Gelman, 2026), and those that are visible in scientific publications can be difficult for lay audiences (including key stakeholders like science journalists) to understand. Science communication and advocacy are increasingly seen as an imperative for cognitive science researchers (Rouzer et al., 2023).

Basic researchers may not always see an immediate practical application for a finding, but public communication need not depend only on direct application. Outreach can also help audiences understand what kinds of questions cognitive scientists ask, why those questions matter, and how evidence accumulates across studies. The workshop will therefore emphasize translation rather than simplification: preserving accuracy and nuance while choosing language, examples, and visual forms that non-specialists can understand and use.

International reach matters. As CogSci 2026 will be held in Rio de Janeiro, this workshop will explicitly consider the limits of English-dominant science communication and the need to reach audiences across languages, cultures, and platforms (Parsey et al., 2026). Topics will include accessibility for non-native English readers, cultural differences in authority and trust, asynchronous engagement across time zones, and visual design across languages.

Presenter Contributions

Lauren N. Girouard, CogSci Outreach Coordinator, will organize and moderate the workshop. She will open by framing the central challenge: empirical findings do not automatically become public-facing messages. Participants will be invited to distinguish among a study, a result, a takeaway, and a post, establishing shared vocabulary for the moderated discussions and final activity.

Marcelo Viridiano, Content Production Manager for the Cognitive Science Society, will contribute expertise in graphic design and visual communication, approaching science communication as a design problem and arguing that every choice a researcher makes about format, platform, and framing is a design decision that shapes how audiences receive and understand their work. His fireside chat will address the design decisions that run alongside the writing ones: which format to choose, which platform to prioritize, how visual choices shape credibility and attention, and how the instinct to reach everyone at once can undermine the specificity that makes communication land. Drawing on his experience as a visual designer for scientific societies and academic institutions, Viridiano will use real examples from brand campaigns and broader communication practice to illustrate why the most effective science communication tends to come not from optimizing for reach, but from communicating with specificity and a genuine voice.

Jessica Chomik-Morales will contribute expertise as a multilingual science writer, neuroscience communicator, cognitive neuroscience researcher, and member of the MIT Graduate Program in Science Writing. Her fireside chat will address broader science communication principles that participants can apply to social media: translating jargon into accessible language, writing for non-specialist audiences, using narrative without sacrificing accuracy, and deciding which details to omit, preserve, or foreground. Her experience communicating neuroscience in Spanish, including through Mi Última Neurona, and her fluency in Spanish and Portuguese will help foreground multilingual and culturally responsive outreach.

Workshop Structure and Outcomes

The half-day workshop will include an opening framing, two moderated fireside chats with Q&A, and a guided drafting activity. The planned structure is: 15 minutes for opening; 45 minutes for Viridiano's fireside chat and Q&A; 45 minutes for Chomik-Morales's fireside chat and Q&A; 20 minutes for synthesis; 60 minutes for an interactive social media post activity; and 15 minutes for final share-out and wrap-up.

Participants will be encouraged to bring one empirical finding from their own work, and sample findings will be provided for those who do not have one ready. During the activity, participants will work individually, with think-pair-share checkpoints at key decision points. They will choose a platform they already have and would be open to using, identify a target audience beyond academia, draft coordinated written and visual content, check for accuracy and accessibility, and end with a clear action for the audience.

Participants will leave with a complete draft post, a worksheet/template for repeating the activity workflow, and a shared resource list. More importantly, they will leave with a reusable process for translating empirical cognitive science into public-facing written and visual communication. The goal is to make cognitive science more visible and to help researchers practice making empirical work more understandable, trustworthy, and reachable for communities beyond academia.

This workshop is an official Cognitive Science Society Outreach Committee event. It is part of a collection of annual initiatives that promote diverse participation in Cognitive Science.

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