Hallo everyone! My name is Charlie Rapple, and I am one of the co-founders of Kudos, which is a platform for showcasing science so that more people find, understand and use it.

I'm talking today about research impact and what it takes to reach and influence broader audiences.

My main point is that for research to have impact, the people who can apply it need to find it and understand it. This requires a more structured approach to communication, particularly to reach and engage audiences beyond academia. There has been a gap between what researchers are expected to achieve in terms of broader audiences and impact, and the skills and tools required to achieve that.

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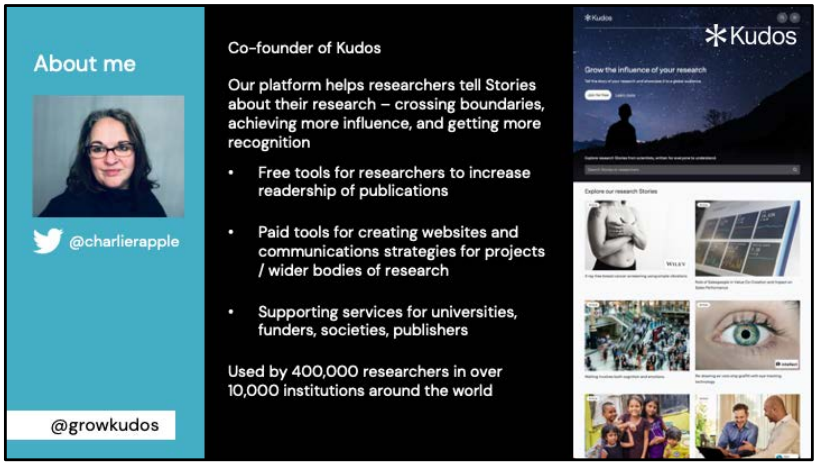


That's the challenge I've been trying to help solve since launching Kudos 10 years ago. We've developed tools and services to help increase readership and recognition for researchers.

This includes free tools for researchers to increase readership of publications

Paid tools for creating websites and communications strategies for projects / wider bodies of research

Supporting services for universities, funders, societies, publishers

We've also led a number of research studies into aspects of research communication and impact – looking at what is expected of researchers, what they struggle with, what support they need, and how this is evolving. We've analyzed the different ways that people promote their work, we've researched communications across the lifecycle of a research project or grant, we've explored the challenges involved in reaching broader audiences.

So that's the background I'm drawing on as I talk to you today about research

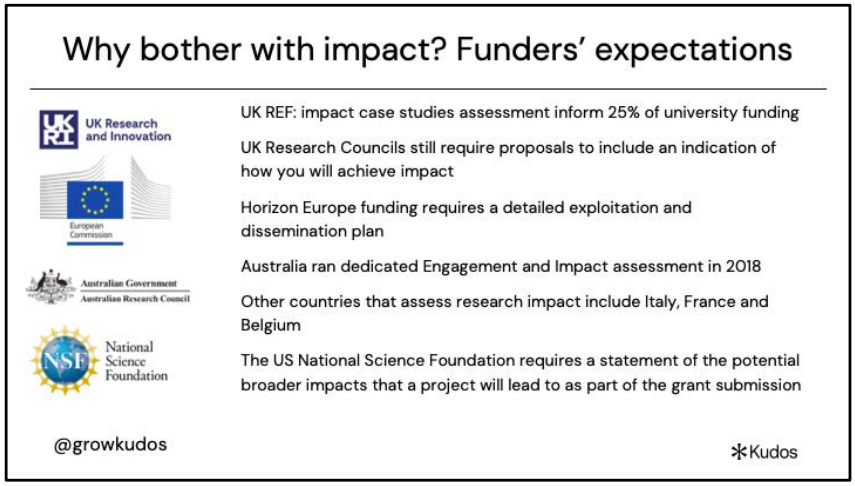
impact.

Let's get started! By asking: what is research impact?
You will find several definitions of impact from funders and universities.
While there are some subtle differences, they ultimately coalesce around demonstrable and beneficial change in behaviours, beliefs and practices

Over the years I've found myself summing it up for people with this simple phrase:
More people
Benefiting from research
More quickly

Having defined impact at this high level
It's then possible to define a number of types of impact
I'm using definitions here developed by Professor Mark Reed, who has analysed case studies from around the world
His ten types of impact are
Understanding and awareness – meaning your research helped people understand an issue better than they had before
Attitudinal – your research helped lead to a change in attitudes
Economic – your research contributed to cost savings, or costs avoided; or increases in revenue, profits or funding
Environmental – benefits arising from your research aid genetic diversity, habitat conservation and ecosystems
Health and well-being – your research led to better outcomes for individuals or groups
Policy – your research contributed to new or amended guidelines or laws
Other forms of decision-making and behaviour impacts
Cultural – changes in prevailing values, attitudes and beliefs
Other social impacts –such as access to education or improvement in human rights
Capacity or preparedness – research that helps individuals and groups better cope with changes that might otherwise have a negative impact.

I can thoroughly recommend Mark Reed's book, if you'd like to learn more about each of these areas and how to understand the potential outcomes of your research in each area.

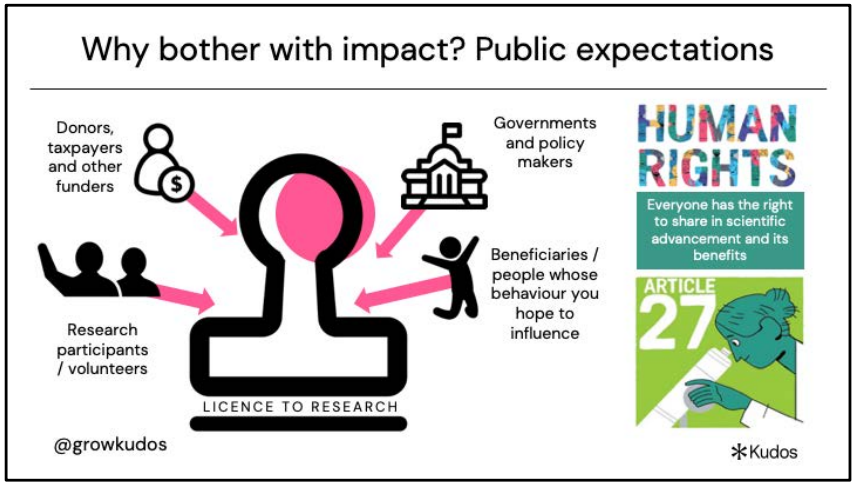


Next let's ask why we should care about research impact.

One very blunt reason for caring about research impact is that more and more research funders require researchers to show what steps they are taking to help broaden the impact of their work – and to provide evidence of what they have achieved.

This won't be news to you! You'll remember that impact case studies made up 25% of the REF 2021 results. And while UKRI no longer requires separate pathways to impact as part of proposals, they do still require that you set out "how you will or might achieve impact throughout your project, and include this as part of your proposal".

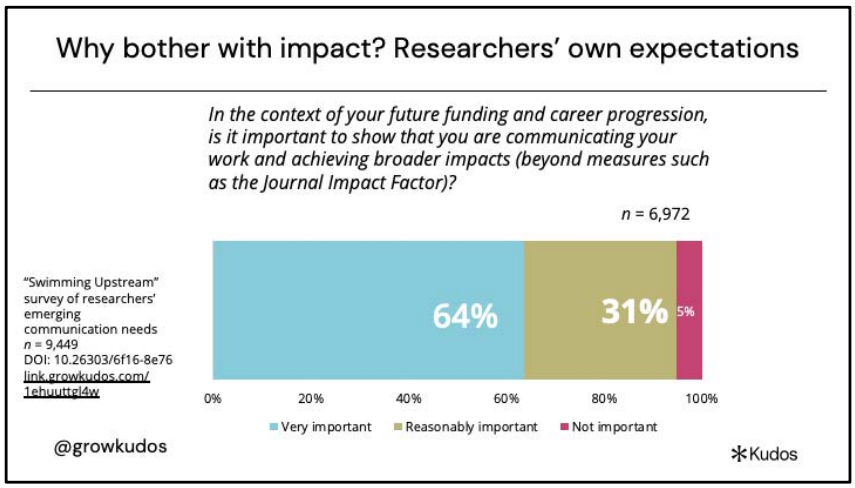
And impact is not just a UK phenomenon - Horizon Europe requires impact pathways as part of submissions; the Australian research council set up an engagement & impact assessment program in 2018; the National Science Foundation in the US is increasing its requirements around 'broader impacts'.



There are also growing societal expectations of research. Taxpayers, donors, funders, research participants and beneficiaries are all paying more attention to how research budgets are spent, the relevance of the research, and this is happening in a climate where there have been trust issues between society, and those they perceive as experts.

There is also a growing trend for seeing research within the framework of human rights - the UN's universal declaration of human rights has "everyone has the right to share in scientific advancement and its benefits" as article 27 -

We need to make sure people are benefiting from research – and that they know that!



It is also increasingly common for researchers to want to achieve broader impacts with their research

In one of the studies I have led at Kudos, we found that 95% of respondents said that it's important for them to show they are communicating their work and achieving broader impacts beyond traditional measures of academic quality such as publication record

Developing these skills now and building evidence of your capabilities could become very important over the next few years

So whether for moral reasons, or for reasons of research quality or relevance, or purely for financial purposes, it's increasingly important to try and maximize the impact of our research and to communicate this effectively, right from the very beginning of a project lifecycle

If we agree with need to try and maximize our impact, then naturally the next question is – how do we do that?

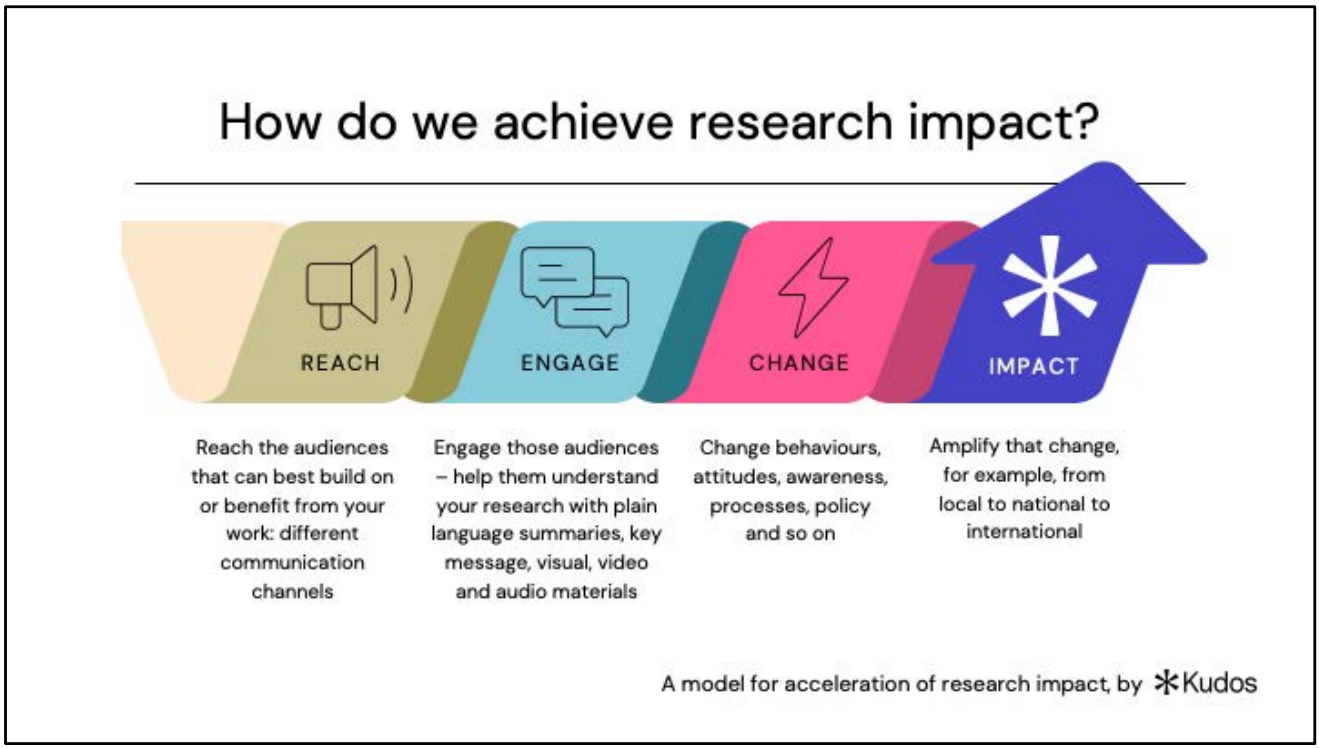
As far as I'm concerned, it comes down to communication.

To be philosophical for a moment:

If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?

And by the same token, if people can't find and understand research, can it have impact?

This is why communication is the first step towards research impact.



At Kudos we've developed this model – breaking down the steps towards impact into reaching the necessary audiences, making sure that these audiences are aware of your research – your findings, your recommendations, how you want them as a community to act or benefit from your research, thereby bringing about change, and then scaling that change.

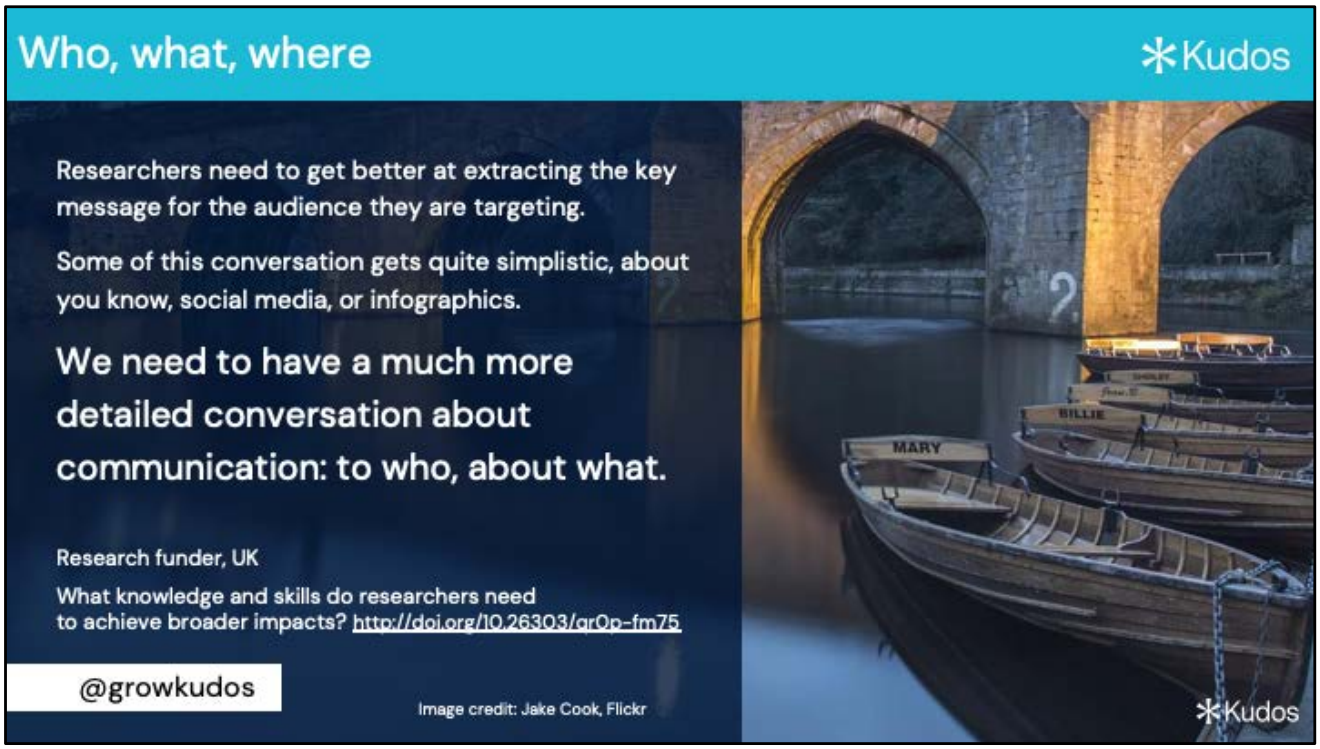
And a lot of this depends on communication.

Communicating research is not as much of a secret art as people think.

It's really just a case of being clear on who your research is for,

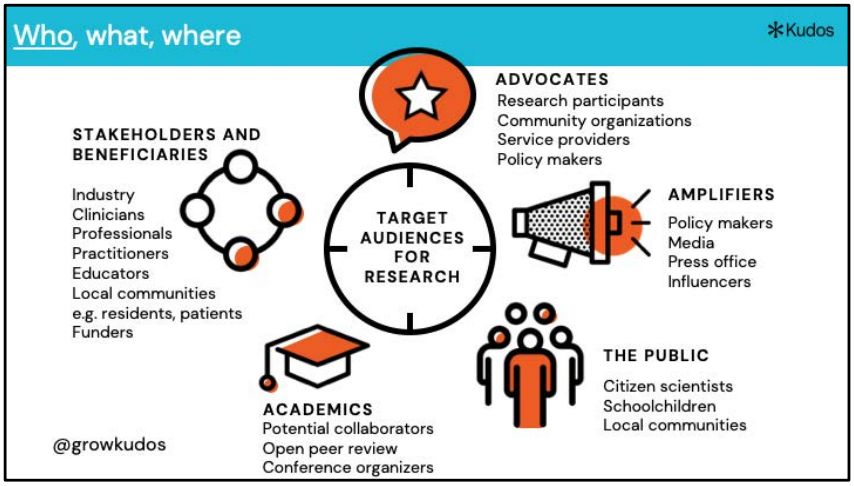
And then how you can best communicate to those people – what to say, so that they'll understand you, and where to say it, so that they'll actually see it.

I've got some good cheat sheets coming up to help you with working this out!



Because we know there is a skills gap or a confidence gap here. Researchers report this themselves and funders are aware of it too. This is a comment from an interview with a research funder during a study we did about the challenges of getting research picked up and used outside of academia.

“Researchers, wherever they are based, need to get better skilled at extracting exactly what the key message is for the audience they are targeting. Some of this conversation gets quite simplistic, about you know, social media, or infographics. We need to have a much more detailed conversation about communication: to who, about what. “



So let's start with who you might need to communicate your research to.

As we touched on earlier, there are many difference audiences within which you might be trying to build visibility, influence and impact.

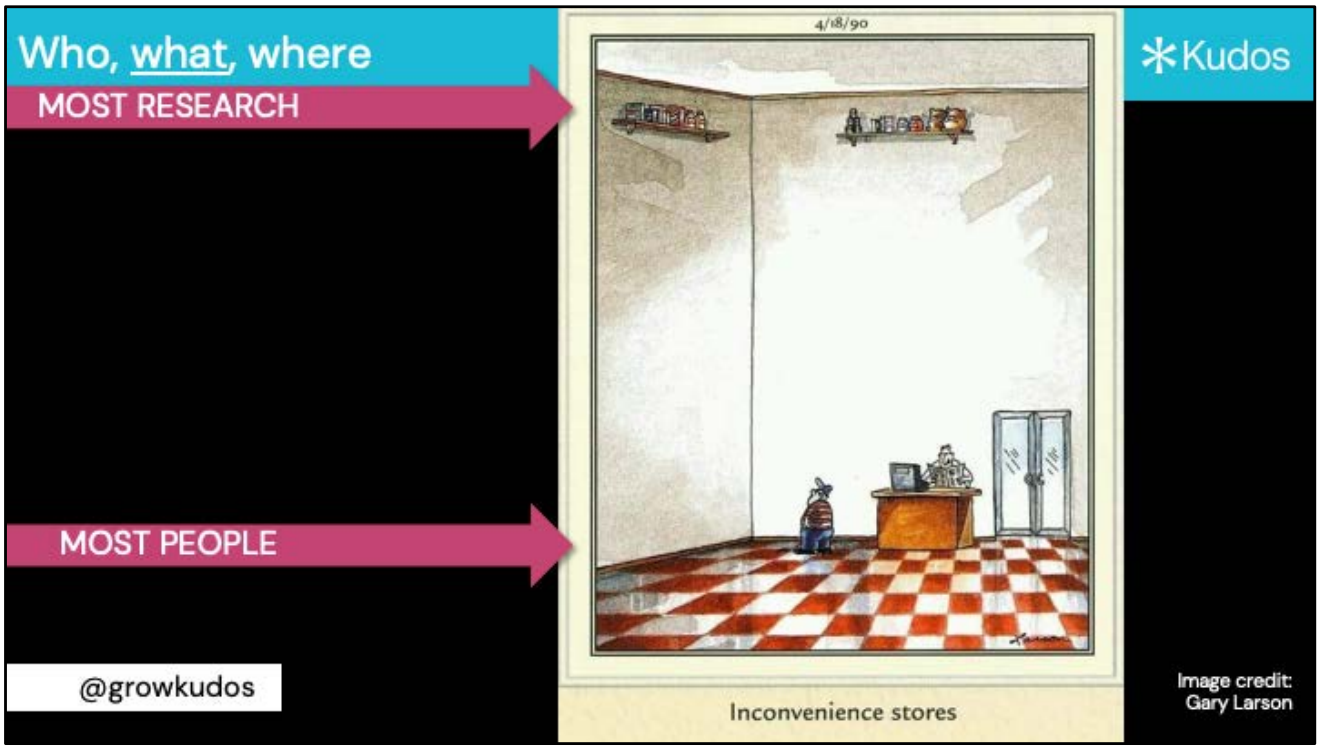
There are people who actually have a stake in your work, or who might benefit from or apply your findings, both within and beyond academia.

There are people who might help you reach some of those audiences by acting as advocates for your work.

And people who can help amplify your work.

As well as the wider public, and of course, other academics.

And if we really want each of these groups to understand, apply, cite and benefit from our research, then we need to tell them the story of our research in a way that helps them understand its relevance and implication for them.

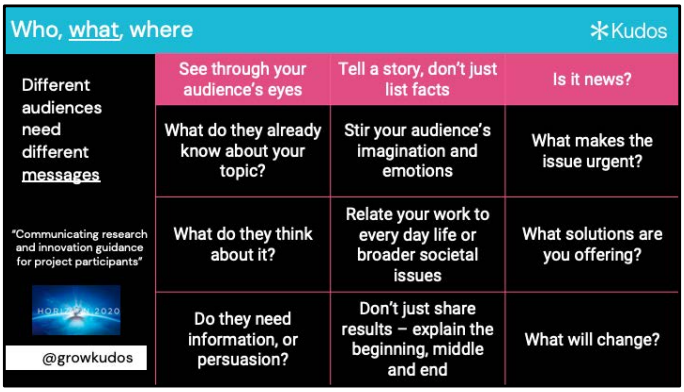


Much of research communication has been designed for and focused on communication between academics.
For people outside academia, it's a bit like Gary Larson's "inconvenience store".
The information is too high level.
It's out of reach of most people.

To make yourself understood,
You have to think plain and write plain.
So said William Feather – the original influencer – he was publishing 'memes' like this in a monthly magazine for 75 years before he died in 1981

Thinking plain and writing plain is not necessarily hard, but it does need you to think in a more purposeful way, particularly to reach and engage audiences beyond academia.

And it is really key to 'navigating the impact landscape'.



What you say needs to be shaped around what your audience already know, how they feel about it – what they will relate to – and what they might aspire to. And funders do provide guidance on this. Here's a summary of the European Commission's guidance from the Horizon 2020 cycle:.

It boils down to these three things:

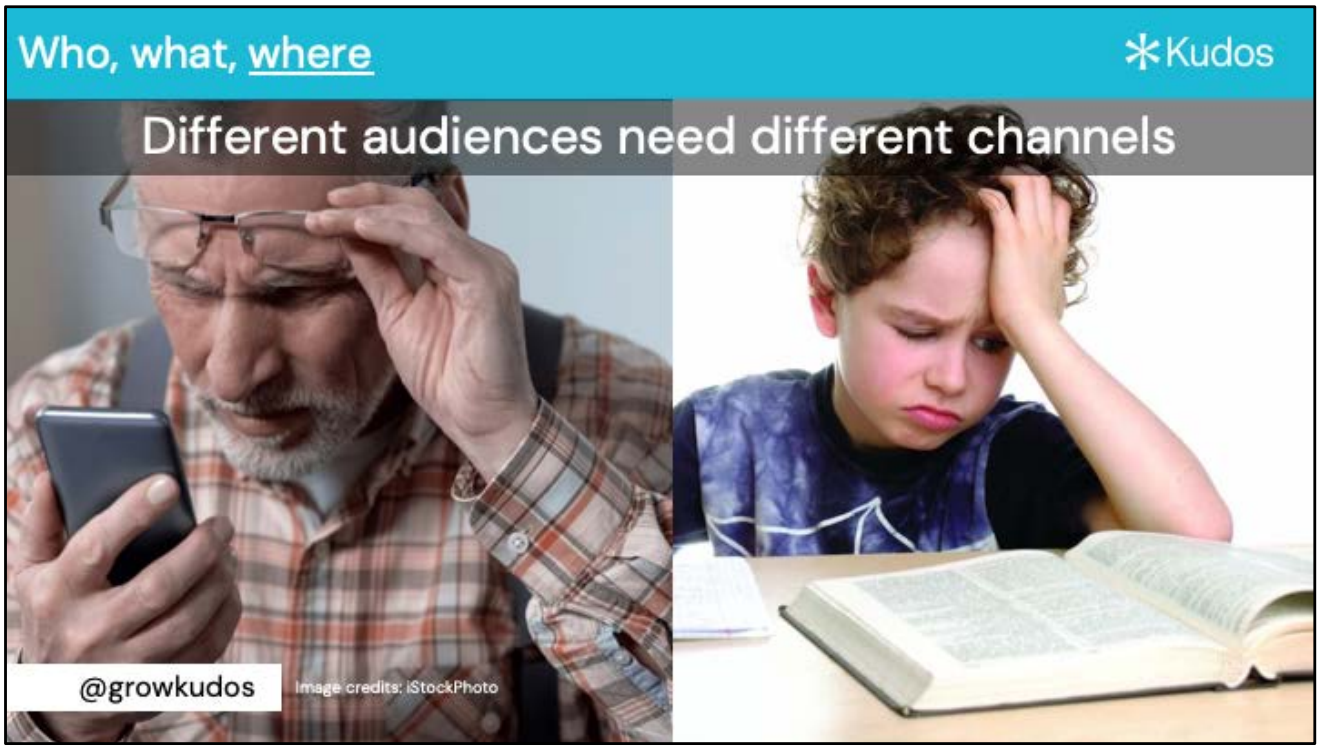
Helping researchers to see through the audience's eyes. When you're really immersed in what you do, it's easy to forget how little other people are aware of it. And researchers have been trained to communicate at high levels. But our wider societal audiences really need us to start at the beginning.

And they need a story! Researchers need help to appeal to people's emotions, to be clear about how and why the research is relevant to them. To give it a memorable shape.

There is some overlap with the structure of a scientific communication – but not much! A lot of the information academics are used to having to provide is way too deep for grabbing attention – people aren't looking for methodological details. They want to know about how this research might affect their life, their behaviour, their

health, whatever.

So we need to help researchers separate non-academic communication from academic communications – a different structure and language is required.



The next question is where you communicate. There are so many different channels you could be using – websites, social media, conferences, workshops, broadcast media, email, consultation – and so on.

That's why it's really important to start with thinking about who your target audience is – because that's going to help you narrow down the options and picks channels that are comfortable for and widely used by the people you're trying to reach.

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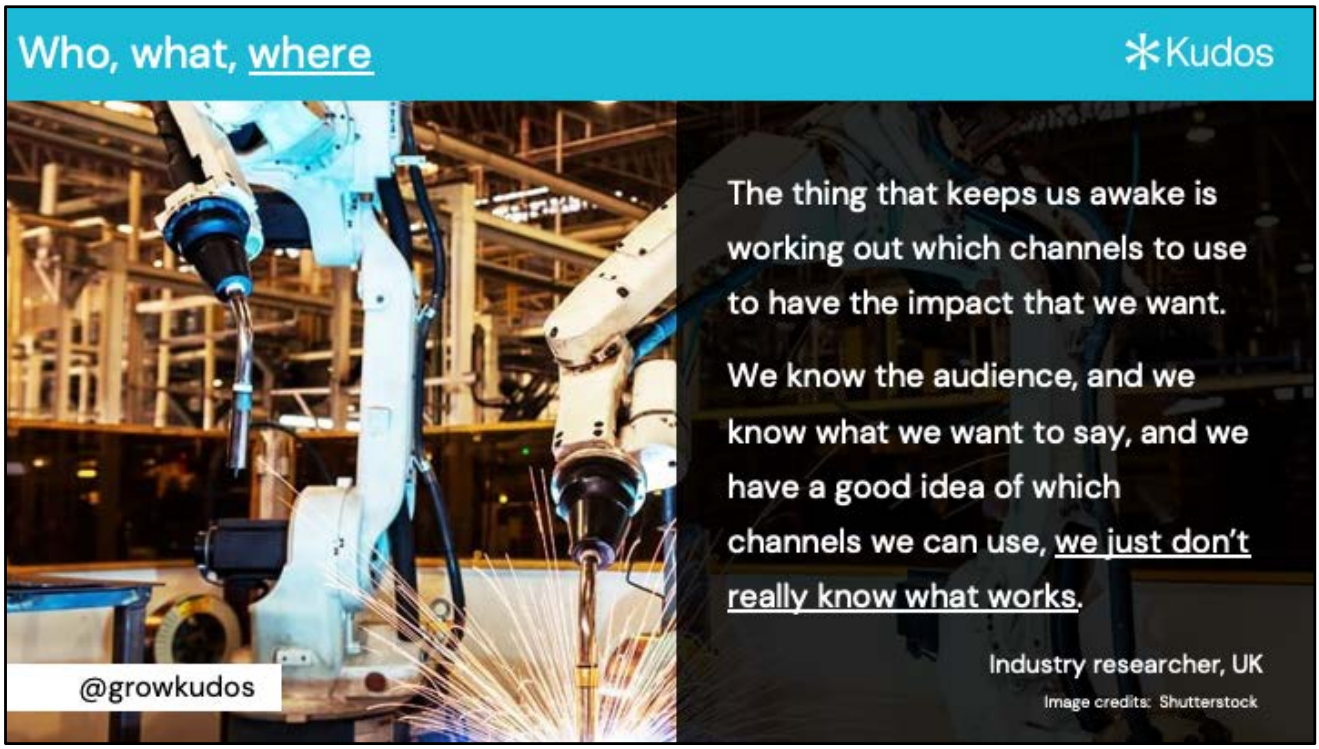
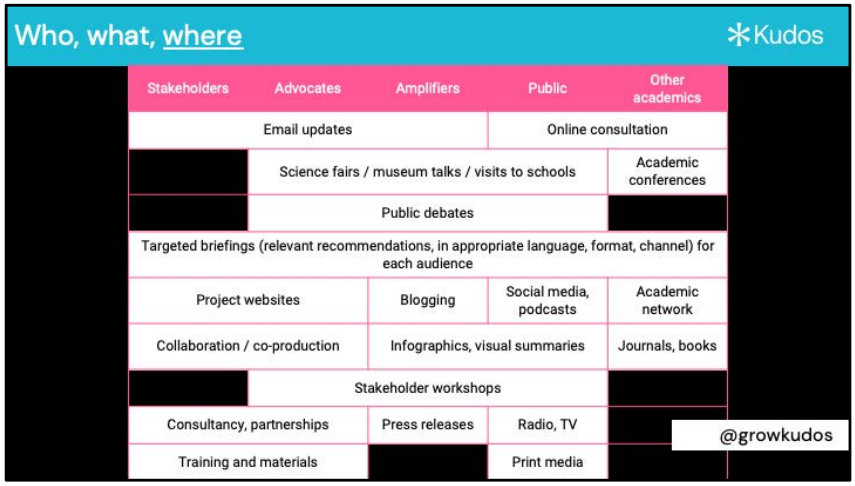


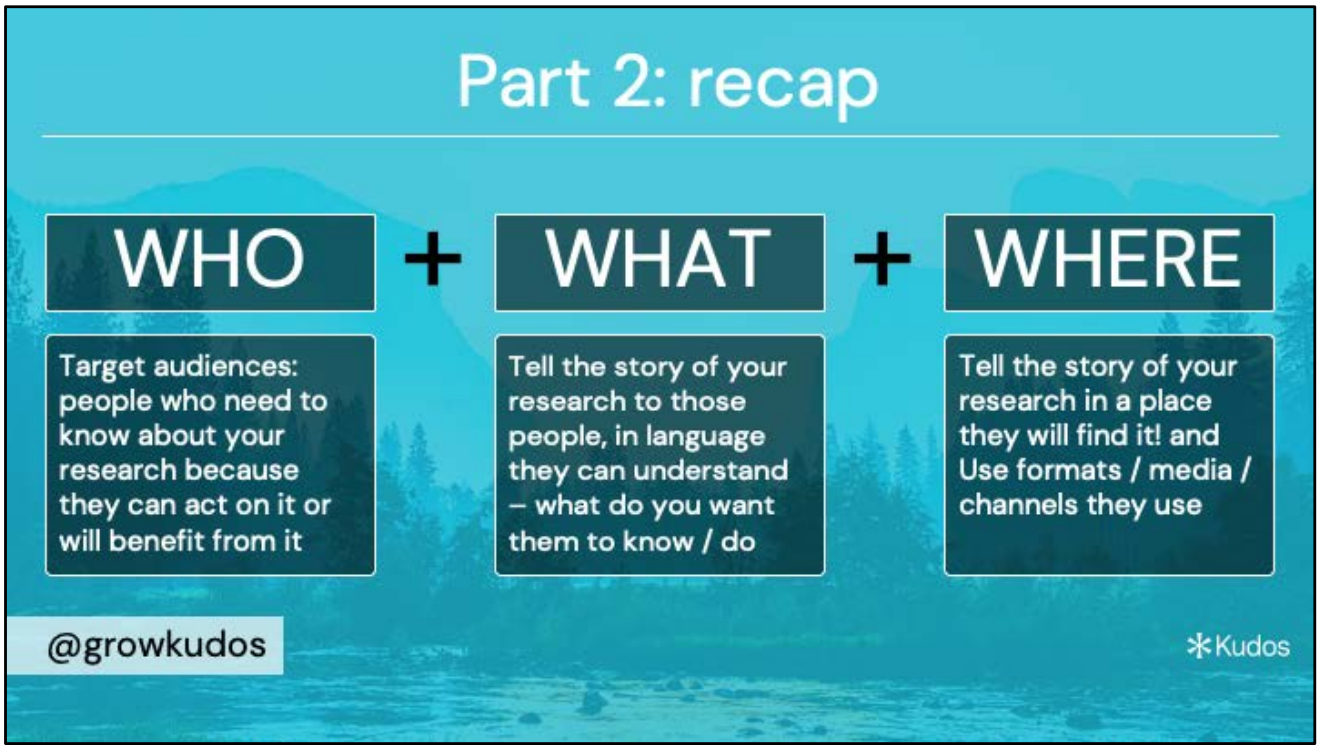
And lots of people struggling with knowing which of these options to pick. There is a tendency to just "do what we've done before" and to be a bit "one size fits all". And while people have often tried a range of things, they usually haven't done that in a very scientific way – tracking which things are most effectively drawing the right audiences to their work.

This is another quote from the Bridging the Divide study about reaching audiences beyond academia, and it encapsulates the challenge well – "we know the audience, we know what we want to say, and we have a good idea of which channels we can use, we just don't really know what works!"



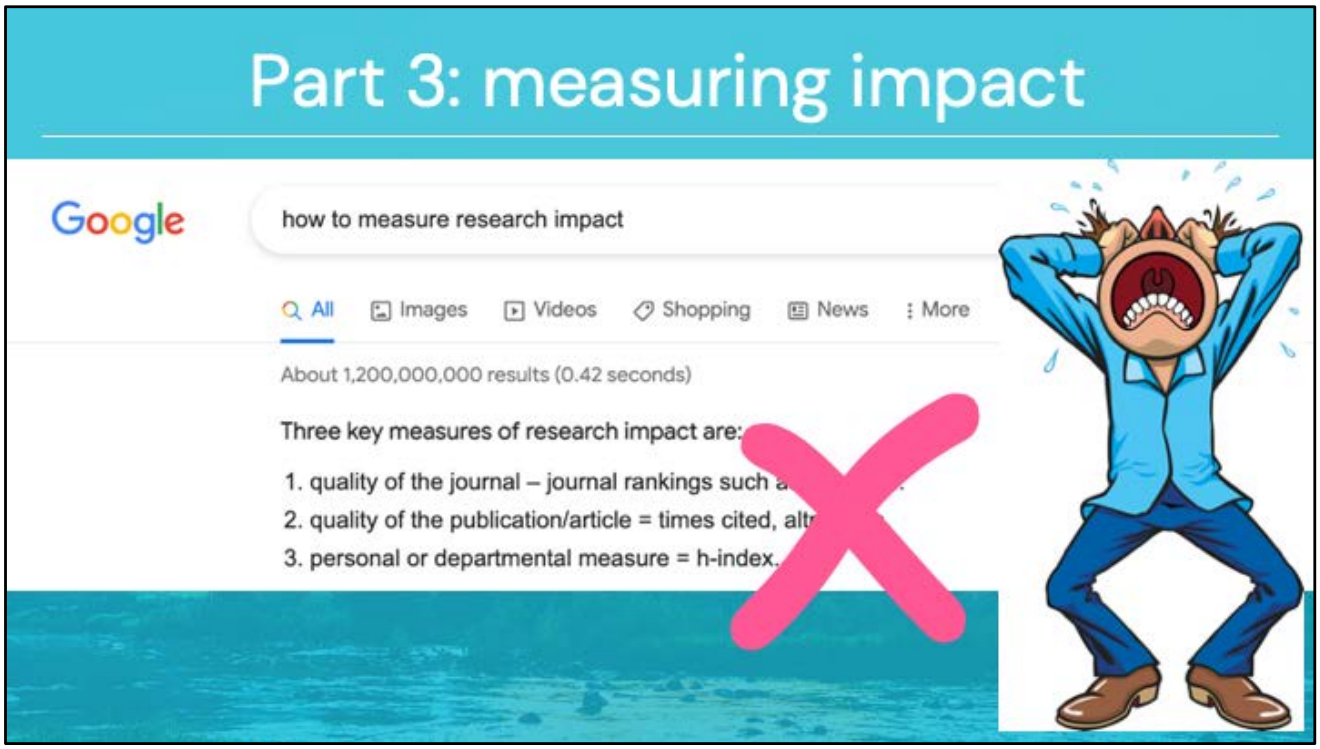
Of course, knowing what works means means measuring and monitoring what you do, against meaningful goals. This is something we provide really cool tools for at Kudos – I'll give you a very brief look in a moment at how we help you identify target audiences, set your impact goals, and then measure your efforts to achieve those goals.

But to sum all that up, over the years we've gathered and tracked lots of data about how people communicate to different audiences, to try and then help people make that choice in an informed way. And I've tried to sum up all that intelligence in this table showing you the best ways to reach and engage some of the different target audiences you might have for your research.



Before I move on to measurement, let's recap part 2: the secret to research impact is making sure your findings reach their target audience.

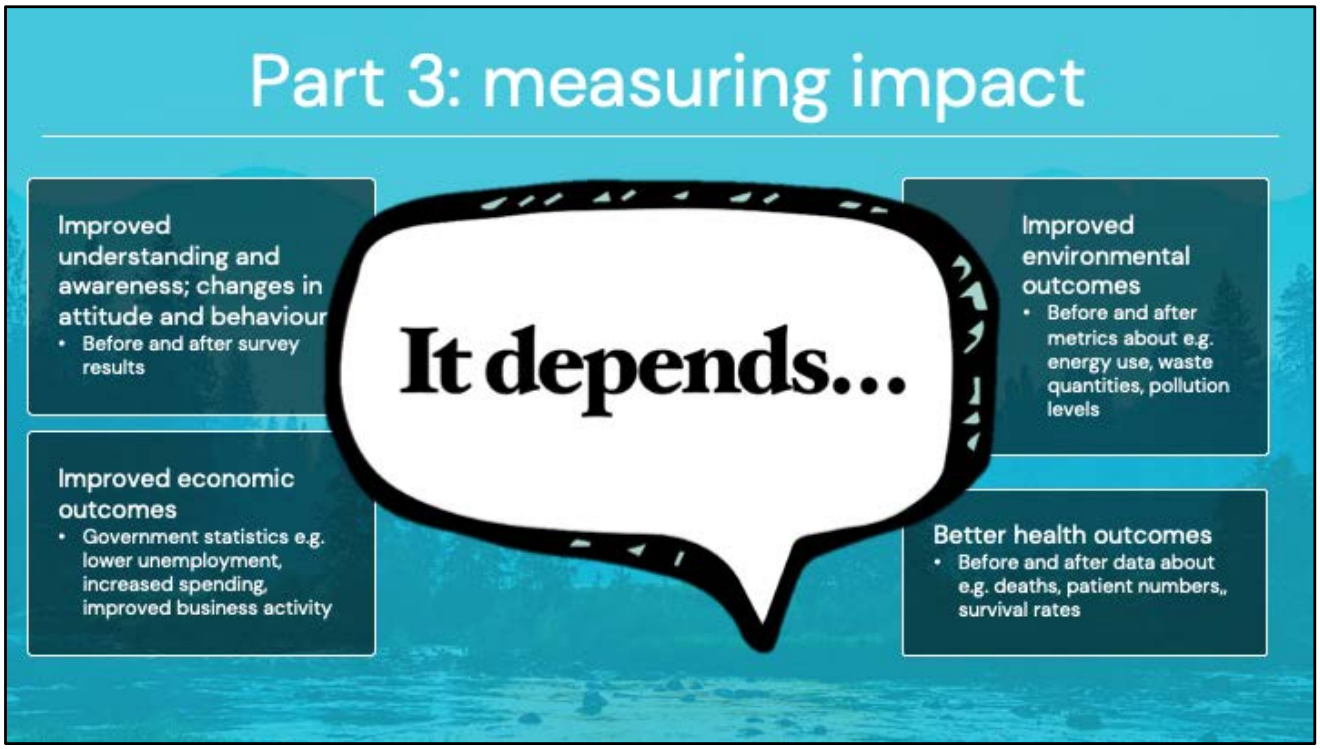
You need to work out who can act on it or benefit from it.
Tell the story of your research to those people, in language they can understand
And tell it in a place they will find it



The last thing I want to touch on today is the importance of measuring your efforts to realise the impact of your research.

I'll start here, because it broke my heart just a little bit. I've been working in this field for over 10 years, seeing a really active movement of people trying to move us away from thinking about research impact in terms of publication impact.

And still when you Google „how to measure research impact" the first result you see is ... All about publication impact.



That‘s partly because the actual answer is more complicated, and Google doesn‘t like complicated answers!

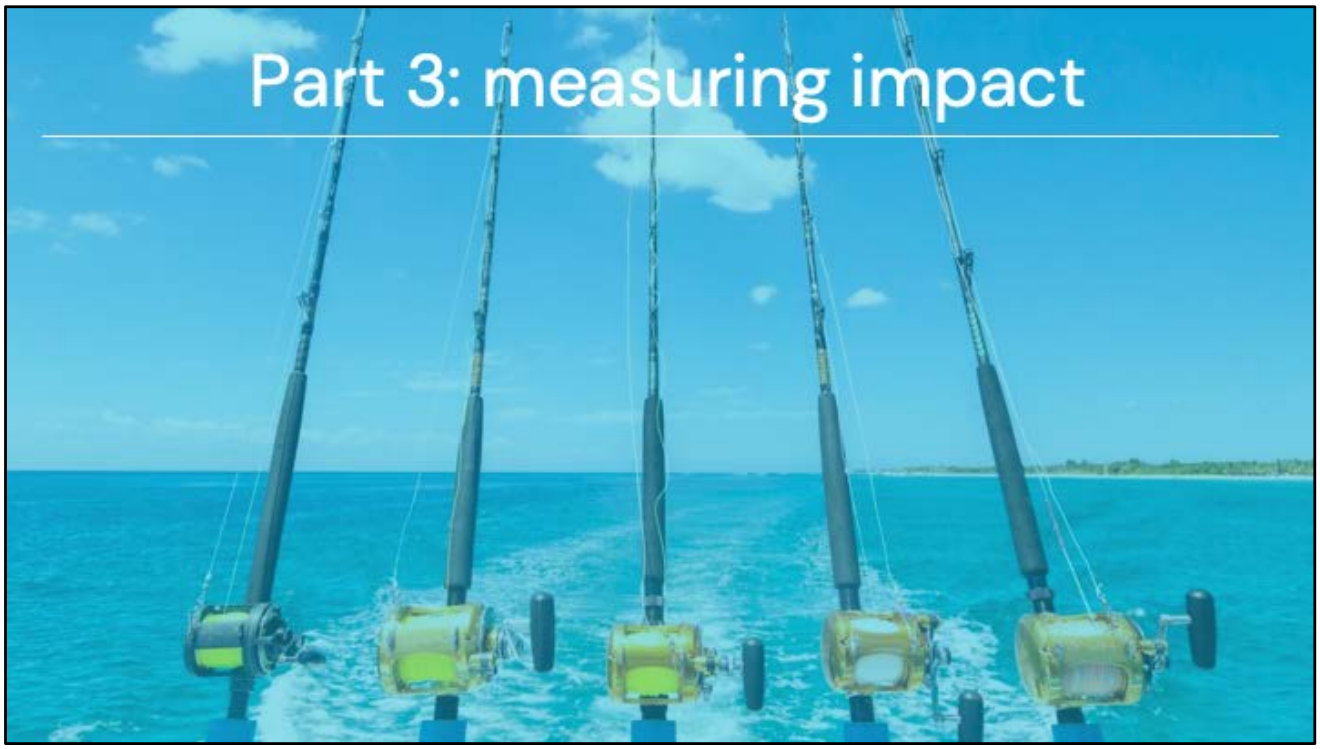
The answer, of course, is “ it depends“ – on the type of research you are doing and what sort of impacts you might be aiming for. You might be trying to change behaviours, or attitudes, or improve economic or environmental outcomes.

As part of your research planning you will be identifying the kinds of outcomes you are aiming for, and the ways they might be measured – and hopefully putting mechanisms in place to capture a baseline, and evaluate any changes to that baseline in due course.

What you measure will depend on the type of impact you hope to achieve. If you hope to improve awareness, or change attitudes or behaviours, you might track progress through before and after surveys. If you are trying to improve economic outcomes you might use local government statistics.

The one thing all of these outcomes and metrics have in common is that they take time to achieve. and you and everyone around you is going to want some leading indicators along the way to know whether you are heading in the right direction.

So what I‘m going to add to this picture, today, is the things you can do „one step back“ along the breadcrumb trail from this „ultimate“, long term impact.



A breadcrumb trail from your research to your impact is one good metaphor for it.

Another one is my fishing rods!

As you tell people about your research, to try and bring and about impact, you will try a number of different things – emails, posters, talks, social media and so on.

This is like setting up lots of rods when you go fishing.

What you want to do is keep checking the tension on those rods – which might be going to bring you a catch.

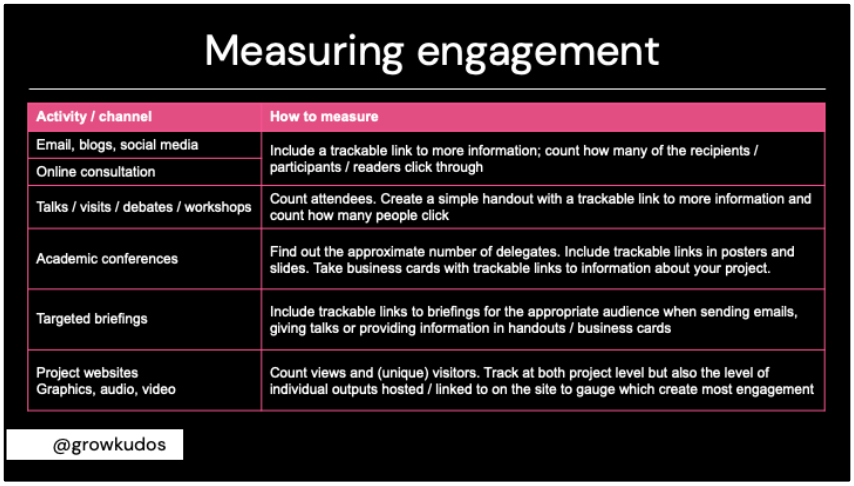
Measuring the different things you do to communicate gives you a way of checking the tension on those rods – a sense of whether you have a bite, and if so, which line should you reel in!

One of the things that I see most commonly with academics' engagement activities is a lot of time and effort and budget being spent without any tracking – which means that you just don't know whether you are actually reaching your target audiences or achieving the recognition you're looking for. You don't know which of

your rods is bringing in the bites.

So measuring your communicatoin efforts gives you a leading indicator (is my research getting attention among my target audiences), helps you know where to follow up to better develop and measure that impact – and helps make your communications more efficient and effective, as you learn what works (what to do more of) and what doesn‘t (what to do less of).

And once again, if you're not persuaded by how much more efficiently you will spend your time and budget, or by how much more effective your communications will be.. Be persuaded by the fact that funders around the world are strengthening and expanding their requirements around communications – expecting grant submissions to include detailed plans along the lines of everything I've covered today – the audiences you are trying to reach, your objectives for each audience, how you plan to reach them, what you are planning to say – and how effective your efforts are.



So just as good communication can help you achieve more impact,
So measuring your communication can help you measure your impact.

One of the most basic things you can do is create trackable links for your communication. If you email people and you include a link to more information about your project, make sure that link is one that you can track – so you can see if any of the recipients actually clicks through to find out more.

If you give a talk make sure you include a trackable link for “more information” in your slides or your handout.

If you have business cards – put a trackable link on them or in your email signature - so you can see whether the people you connect with are engaging with your work. At a conference, for example, you can then count not only the number of meetings you had, or the number of people there, but actually how many people came and looked at more information for your work.

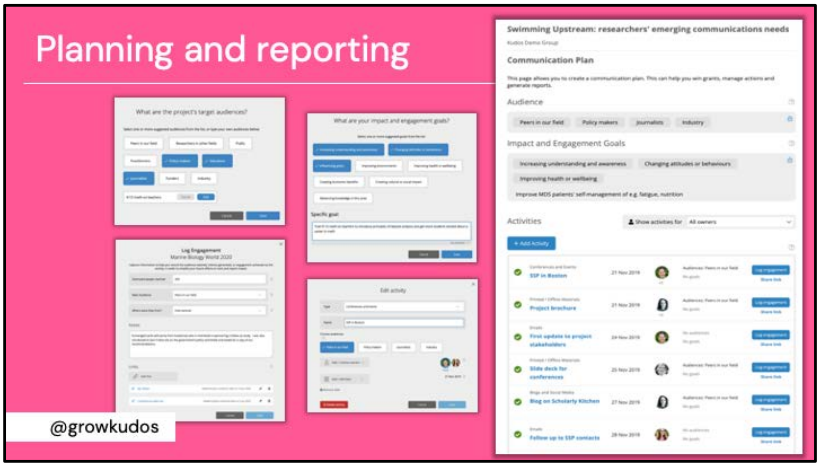
There are free URL tracking services online and we’ve also built a URL tracker into Kudos.

Measuring engagement

Just to show you that briefly – we have tools to help you with all this stuff in Kudos.

You can use a really simple online wizard to help you create beautiful web pages about your research publications and projects.
It's really nice and flexible so you can also use it to Showcase your other outputs – posters, data, images, videos, whatever you have.

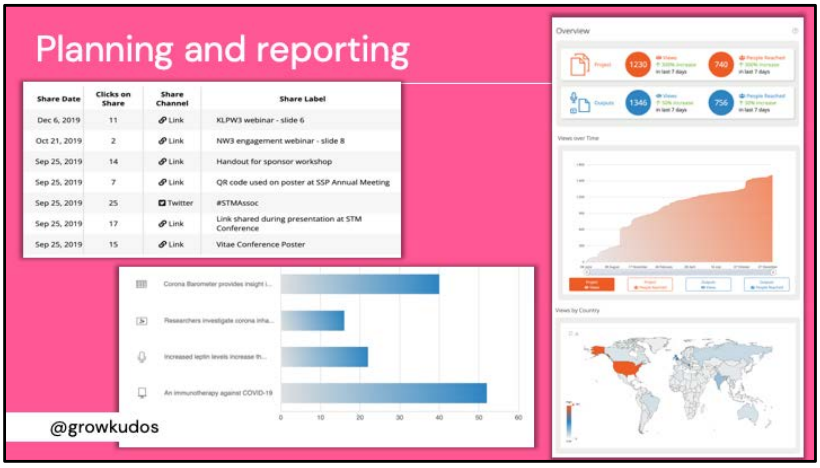
And you can create trackable links to these pages so you know where you have publicized them, and can see which of those activities has been more or less effective.



If you're working in a group you can also use our planning tools – these help you take the sort of structured, evidence-based approach that funders are looking for, and help you manage actions across your group, while also capturing all the data you are going to need for reporting.

It's a totally unique tool for joining the dots between the research you do, and the impact you hope to achieve.

It helps you plan the audiences you want to reach, the goals you want to achieve, and the activities and channels you will use – you can set up tasks for each other, track deadlines, and as well as automatically tracking clicks on your trackable links, you can also manually add any other evidence of impact or engagement here so you have a central record.



And then out the other end of the process you get all this fabulous data in one place – how many people you have reached, where they are, which of your outputs they looked at, which of your communication efforts brought them to your content – making it easy to report on, but also easy to see which types of outreach activities are most effectively helping you build impact potential with your target audiences.

I think the IAA team will be making this toolkit available for projects that request this kind of support so do talk to Elaine and colleagues about it.

So. In summary.

    - Identifying who can use or benefit from your research
    - Explaining your findings and recommendations in language they can understand
    - Making info available in formats and places they are familiar with
- Don’t throw spaghetti at the wall! Take a scientific approach – plan, measure, make sure you only spend time and budget on what works

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