



A look at the complex issues of science communication: the Routledge Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology

Reviewed Book

BUCCHI, M. AND TRENCH, B. EDS. (2021).
HANDBOOK OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. 3RD ED.
LONDON, U.K.: ROUTLEDGE

Reviewed by

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Abstract

In the year of the PCST Conference that brings together scholars and experts in public communication of science, Routledge published the new edition of the Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology, edited by Massimiano Bucchi and Brian Trench. The book, in its third edition, seeks to update and define the field of study and application of science communication from both a theoretical and empirical point of view mostly in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic which undoubtedly represents an event of historical significance that cannot fail to question scholars on the medium and long-term effects.

Keywords

Popularization of science and technology; Science communication in the developing world; Science communication: theory and models

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How to improve the public communication of science is going to be an important issue for most societies and cultures, especially after the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic that evidenced the social role of public communication of science and its multiple ways of developing around the world.

The third edition of the Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology, edited by Massimiano Bucchi and Brian Trench, offers several theoretical analysis on science communication's models and provides an open and broad perspective of science communication.

Compared to previous editions, the book has been extensively renewed and contributions from new authors have been added, taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the recent pandemic to investigate, in particular, the new

balances that have formed between expertise and public. The book represents a collaboration of authors and scholars united by the international PCST network which past 24–27 May held its biennial own conference, animating and enriching the debate on public communication of science and promoting a fruitful collaboration between networks of scholars and world institutions. The aim is to highlight, in its 17 chapters, the different intersections present in the science communication practices and the main debates on the future challenges in science communication.

The book, indeed, investigates in a multidisciplinary perspective the multiple spaces and themes in which public communication of science is applied: from the theme of the environment to the relationship between art and science, from risk communication to trends in museums. and science center. Each reader will be able to find useful and updated reflections on the new challenges of science journalism in the digital age or indications on the concepts and tools useful for evaluating public engagement activities or, again, a very precious collection of empirical research on public opinion of science in worldwide. The Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology provides an updated review of the literature and a privileged point of view on the most recent results of national and international research activities which makes it a rich guide for teachers, students, researchers and practitioners in this field.

The book is also a valuable tool for public communication scholars and students of public communication of science and technology. Both will find important insights on the main topics concerning this important discipline

Considering the particular period in which the book is published, characterized by the Covid-19 pandemic and by the “unprecedented public exposure of scientific experts” as Bucchi and Trench recall in the introduction, the contribution on the media visibility of the scientists who acquire visibility in the public sphere and became “stars”, intercepting a particularly relevant trend, a social character that characterizes modernity. Furthermore, the growing professionalization of public communication of science and technology has become a factor in mobilizing scientists in the public arena which requires a progressive increase in communication skills. This poses new challenges for researchers, scientific institutions and scientists’ educational pathways.

The book, however, overlooks — perhaps inevitably — some aspects that are characterizing the public communication of science such as the political, moral, and legal implications and renounces to explore models of science communication that takes into account the political contexts in which science communication takes place. A reader interested in a global perspective could also perceive the absence of the important and established initiatives and perspectives that come from countries not sufficiently considered in the contributions present in the Handbook. Furthermore, the contributions do not seem to fully respond to the challenges posed to science communication by the Covid-19 crisis “around long-standing questions about communicating science with policy-makers, and the claims of the latter to be ‘following science’, or to questions as “what will be the long-term impact of such an unprecedented public exposure of scientific experts on the public images of perception of science and scientists?”.

Despite this, the Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology remains an essential tool for anyone who intends to deepen or begin to approach studies on the public communication of science and the relationships between science and society.

References

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