

**Book Review*****Communicating Climate Change: The Path Forward*****Susanna Priest****(2016, Palgrave Macmillan; ISBN: 978-1-137-58578-3)****Reviewed by****José Castro-Sotomayor****University of New Mexico, US****E-mail: castrosotomayorj@unm.edu**

Communicating Climate Change: The Path Forward by Susanna Priest is an opportune contribution to the conversation on the role of communication in the politics of climate change. The science regarding climate disruption is unequivocal in signaling humans as the primary cause of the Earth's ecological distress. However, despite the scientific community's agreement on the anthropogenic roots of the current environmental state, manifestations of climate denial have grown stronger. Particularly in the United States, these manifestations have intoxicated much of the discussion on climate change. On the positive side, this has given climate change a stronger position in political, public, and media agendas. Political and social synergies are sprouting around the globe in direct defiance to denialist rhetoric, shattering conventional political scenarios. In this context, Priest states, "climate change is something of a communication emergency" (p. 9).

In a concise but comprehensive way, the first two chapters review the state-of-the-art of science communication. The author observes that the field is at a crossroads characterized by a move from an information deficit model – which stated that just transmitting information would persuade individuals to change their behaviour – to a dialogue model of communication that emphasizes public engagement between scientists and non-scientists (the public). This 'paradigm shift', from persuasion to engagement, is far from insinuating a separation between individual and collective approaches. On the contrary, what Priest has accomplished in her critical review is to elucidate opportunities for collaboration, which will broaden the analytical scope of science communication by connecting the knowledge of the effects of communication on the individual with the knowledge of the social. Looking just at the individual level is no longer a viable approach because, as the author states, "Climate change is a social problem not only a scientific one. That is why it will need a social movement solution" (p. 30). Accordingly, Priest puts forward a model of science communication that would help the public navigate the climate science, consider people's political, cultural and even religious world views and values, and identify and build patterns of trust, responsibility, and efficacy (chapter 3). If crafted right,

the author envisions a model that will lead individuals and groups to advocate for broader policy change.

Priest's political perspective on science communication is refreshing for a field that has been dominated by socio-psychological approaches. Her viewpoint compels researchers and practitioners to include more layers of analysis that illuminate how "scientific truth is distilled through collective processes" (p. 121). To understand their complexity, Priest skillfully connects the institutional, technological, and ethical dimensions constituting the social ecology of science communication (chapter 4) and the challenges and opportunities for the field (chapter 5). The author illuminates how the construction of scientific truth is embedded in larger relations of power and institutional constraints that shape the way science is produced, communicated, and used as political leverage. The author's awareness of the social dimensions implicated in science communication reiterates the notion of communication as a process of constructing meaning that has substantial political effects. Her analysis, however, only tangentially addresses one central issue: who benefits from fabricating 'alternative facts' that undermine the scientific consensus and eventually deceive the public?

This question is paramount in a new media landscape that apparently strengthens democracy by increasing and diversifying media outlets. However, the flooding of data and sources, exacerbated by the unequal access to technology, has given rise to a "regime of posttruth" (Harsin, 2015) featuring the proliferation of what Priest calls "knowledge brokers". Additionally, the 'social-technical system', enhanced by the development of new communication technologies, has altered the premises and ethics implicated in scientific work and even scientists' identity – which oscillates between public outreach or enclosed work – and journalists' practices, e.g. the rule of 'fair balance'. Aware of the institutional, technological, and ethical forces informing the social construction of science, Priest envisions a critical science literacy (chapter 6) that provides interpretive cues to understand the methodological diversity and uncertainty intrinsic to the scientific enterprise. Further, the new engagement model demands from climate change communicators a more critical role "to transform the climate change discourse" (p. 52). Democratization, then, is not thought of as more information; on the contrary, democracy's strength parallels to the capacity of the public to critically disaggregate information and understand how scientific knowledge is produced, disseminated, and legitimized, but mainly, who benefits from it.

The rise of critically informed audiences, Priest proclaims, would nurture a climate movement that will be able to keep global ecological distress on the public agenda through their collective action (chapter 7). According to Priest, the central problem in inspiring social mobility on climate change goes hand in hand with the low visibility the issue has on the public agenda. While moments such as the decision of US President Donald Trump to withdraw from the Paris agreement position climate change in the center of the political agenda, the public interest on the topic fades away as the media move toward more 'relevant'/controversial issues. The climate movement must counter the erasure of climate change from the public eye by developing and implementing material and symbolic

resources to generate awareness through the creation of messages that present not only problems but solutions to motivate people to action. This approach entails, and Priest's assertion cannot be overemphasized, looking at *both* face-to-face and mediated interpersonal communication strategies *and* understanding the political structures which foster or hamper decision-making on climate policies.

Communicating Climate Change is a needed contribution to the fight against climate change and for the well-being of our planet and its human and non-human inhabitants. Priest has written an easy-to-read thought-provoking book, which can be used to introduce science communication to undergraduate and graduate students who will gain understanding of the debates and future direction of the field, as well as potential spaces for action. Regarding scholarship, throughout the book Priest draws attention to gaps in science communication research. A concise summary of the key underexplored and underexploited issues in the field would have been useful to ease the way into the four directions she outlines in her last chapter. For an engaged reader, however, research opportunities are easy to identify, and Priest even offers possible questions that, if explored and answered, will surely mark the path forward for science communication.

Reference

Harsin, J. (2015). Regimes of posttruth, postpolitics, and attention economies. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 8(2), 327-333. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12097>