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Mass appeal

Reviewed Book

GEST, J. (2020).
MASS APPEAL. COMMUNICATING POLICY IDEAS IN MULTIPLE MEDIA.
NEW YORK, NY, U.S.A.: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Reviewed by

Ann-Christine Kinzer

Abstract

Justin Gest's book *Mass appeal. Communicating policy ideas in multiple media* illustrates how to communicate research effectively. He offers insights into different mediums and provides practical examples of each. While the author has a background in policy research, his ideas and insight are of interest to a much broader audience with an interest in science communication.

Keywords

Professionalism, professional development and training in science communication; Science and media; Science writing

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Imagine you've done extensive research and published a book but nobody (other than a few specialists in your field and perhaps some of your students) seems to be wanting to read it, meaning your ideas won't generate impact. Starting on a somewhat personal note, Gest describes having had this experience when publishing his first monograph — and he relates how this experience has prompted him to reflect on how to communicate ideas more effectively. Building on his research background in policy and government, Gest argues that policy documents are written to be referenced, thorough and possibly legally binding but not written to be communicated to wider audiences. He further argues that public policy education often focuses on developing policy ideas but usually doesn't teach how to communicate these ideas 'broadly, strategically and effectively' [xi]. These reflections, in turn, prompted him to write *Mass appeal. Communicating policy ideas in multiple media* (2020).

Mass appeal is designed to teach professionals and students whose work is concerned with policy making how to tailor their content to different audiences and how to write for different media. It dedicates one chapter to each of the following: executive summaries; press releases; op-eds and blogs; briefings; broadcast appearances; elevator pitches; websites; and social media. All chapters

cover what the relevant medium is, why it is being used, and how it is written. This is then followed by guidance from a practitioner and a real-life example (the exception to the rule being the chapter on elevator pitches, where we have two rather than one example taken from film). There is much practical advice throughout: the chapter on briefings, for example, offers some key reminders on how to do good public speaking, also bearing in mind body language. The chapter on social media, in turn, suggests turning topic sentences into tweets, that then direct people to relevant webpages to substantiate claims. *Mass appeal* also offers advice on how to set up an effective website. A final chapter — dedicated to the question of how to choose your medium — ties the book together. Gest makes the point here that masses can best be reached by broadcast and social media, elites by op-eds, blogs and executive summaries. Ultimately, he advocates developing your own selective multimedia strategy.

The book is well written throughout and has much to offer to anyone wanting to learn more about strategic communication, providing excellent practical advice. If there is a drawback, it is the fact that Gest limits his target audience to students and professionals whose work is concerned with policy making. The information he provides is, after all, relevant (and indeed accessible) to a much broader audience, including academics from various other disciplines, and professionals working on public engagement and research impact. Adding another layer of complexity to the introductory chapter to address this potential audience might have enhanced the author's own mass appeal.

Author

Ann holds a Ph.D. in German and Comparative Literature (awarded in 2020). She has been working in Higher Education for several years both as a lecturer and as an administrator. Ann held a key role in the development of the University of Kent's impact case studies for submission to the U.K.'s Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021. As both an academic and an Impact Officer Ann has a keen interest in communicating research beyond academia. E-mail: acwak@kent.ac.uk.

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