

Shadowlands of Science Communication in Academia

Potentially harmful objectives

Poor quality and lack of rigor

Exploitation of science communicators



Problems

Science communicators can have harmful objectives and/or vested interests (e.g., receiving funding from a vested interest group to promote certain outcomes, leading to biased communication that serves the funder's agenda).

Poor quality of science communication can sometimes lead to dire consequences (e.g., miscommunications exacerbating disasters).

Science communication in academia can often result from and/or lead to exploitation of those putting in the labor, often early-career and minoritized people.
Science communication activities can hinder scientific pursuits by diverting time and resources from core research activities.

Spectrum of views

Scientists are the most qualified to communicate their science to "laypersons."
There should be a two-way communication between science communicators and audiences.
In specific cases (e.g., during disasters or emergencies), there should be a clear hierarchy of experts and laypersons, with different communication strategies for pre-, during, and post-disaster situations.

Science communication should have the same quality and rigor standards as for science.
Science communication depends on cultural and social contexts, and the same standards of quality and rigor cannot apply/should not be applied.
We should not gatekeep science communication by overemphasizing the "correct" way to do science communication.

Scientists have a moral obligation to communicate their work to benefit society, especially as academics are often tax-payer funded.
Only academics who want to do science communication and/or are good at it should do science communication.
Science communication in academia should be professionalized, including dedicated funding, formal assessments, promotions, awards, etc., similar to teaching.



Potential solutions

Ensure clarity and transparency in objectives and audiences

Train science communicators

Recognize science communication as a valued professional activity