

## A Challenge for Media and Communication Studies: the Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Reviewed Book

KOPECKA-PIECH, K. AND ŁÓDZKI, B. (2022).  
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS A CHALLENGE FOR MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES.  
LONDON, U.K.: ROUTLEDGE

### Reviewed by

**Rod Lamberts**

### Abstract

Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech and Bartłomiej Łódzki's edited volume, *The Covid-19 Pandemic as a Challenge for Media and Communication Studies*, could be of great utility to science communication scholars and teachers. The studies contained within it address two overarching research questions. First, how have media and communication reality changed during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe? Second, how were media and communication studied effectively through that period? The volume features 17 individual studies calling on myriad methods and case examples. This diversity of approaches allows the editors to also address an important, implicit third question. In essence: what has it been like to conduct worthwhile, meaningful, and robust research under such unusual and extreme global circumstances? Each chapter is thorough, detailed and of a high technical standard. This is a book that would likely best serve experienced readers more than novices. The entire compendium bears clear witness to the dynamic nature of social research playing out against a context of enormous global instability.

### Keywords

Health communication; Science and media; Science communication: theory and models

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From the outset, it is clear that Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech and Bartłomiej Łódzki's edited volume, *The Covid-19 Pandemic as a Challenge for Media and Communication Studies*, could be of great utility to science communication scholars and teachers. As the editors themselves note, this is a "truly interdisciplinary volume" that brings together "a diverse group of scholars to explore changes in the significance of media and communication in the era of pandemic". And if there is one thing

that characterises science communication research, it is its interdisciplinarity. So even though this volume is not explicitly for, or by, science communication researchers, it certainly has a place on our shelves.

Across its 17 chapters, authors are charged with addressing two overarching research questions. First, how have media and communication reality changed during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe? Second, how were media and communication studied *effectively* through that period? Beyond this, they were free to present research projects that vary widely in scope and methodology. This wide range of approaches allows the editors to also address an important, implicit third question. In essence: what has it been like to conduct worthwhile, meaningful, and *robust* research under such unusual and extreme global circumstances?

The book is logically organised into four parts: New theoretical and methodological foundations; Changes in media outlets activity and practices; Changes in media content and narration; and Changes in media usage and reception. Early in Part 1, co-editor Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech introduces the critical contextualising questions for researchers who were working from within the exceptional circumstances between Europe's first and second waves of Covid-19. Here she also enjoins researchers and readers alike to not only reflect seriously on questions about priorities and possibilities, but also on matters of duty. Researchers in such times need to go beyond the 'what' and 'how' of their endeavours and incorporate into their deliberations moral, ethical and practical debates about 'why'.

Kopecka-Piech outlines seven main challenges that confront media and communication researchers, ranging from pragmatic issues of methodological suitability and ethics, to "purely human... concerns about the future". Laudably, the ethos of the entire volume goes beyond merely presenting results and posing speculative 'further research should' questions, it also includes examples of practice, and possible solutions to questions raised by researchers. It presents the results of robust research, but when faced with a crisis of such unprecedented magnitude, it strongly encourages researchers to propose potential solutions to the issues their pursuits have identified.

This compilation of papers variously draws our attention to practical, theoretical, methodological, and moral/ethical concerns interwoven with considerations about the social dynamics of medicine, politics and policy, and economics. It offers research contexts that range from the personal to the institutional and societal.

In doing this, the book furnishes us with reflections on the complexities and challenges of conducting research and contextualising methods, results, and conclusions from within the dynamic — and volatile — environment of an active pandemic: a challenging task indeed.

The volume provides myriad examples of social research approaches. The methods employed by various authors draw from quantitative and qualitative traditions. Methods run the gamut of time-honoured techniques of surveys, interviews, varieties of content analysis and participative research, through to more recent approaches such as social network modelling and media-aesthetic analysis. This

diverse array of strategies adds depth and demonstrates the value of multi-perspective approaches not just of the research, but of the researchers themselves.

Many of the studies focus on specific localities, meaning this book contains an excellent compendium of case examples, a feature that might be especially appealing to science communication teachers. However, it's possible that this focus on geographically bounded study domains could lead to questions about the generalizability of some of the results.

Pre-empting such critique, I would argue that many of the findings — and most certainly the methods — could lend themselves to research and theorising beyond the specifics of any one location. In addition, discussion about both the differences and similarities between the various studies also serves to highlight the need for flexible, adaptive and multi-method approaches to communication and media research topics under such unprecedented circumstances as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Each chapter is thorough, detailed and of a high technical standard, and while this is a tribute to the volume, it means this is a book that would likely best serve experienced readers more than novices seeking primers or precisés. That said, the way it is organised allows an informed reader to pick and choose, delving into the individual chapters as suits their individual interests and expertise. Each chapter also provides a wealth of references, again probably of particular interest to teachers and possibly later year tertiary students.

When contemplated *en masse*, the works presented in this book encourage both a deep and wide reflection of research during the pandemic, a situation in which everyone is in some sense both researcher and participant. The entire compendium bears witness to the dynamic nature of social research playing out against a context of enormous global instability.

Anecdotally, there is an increasing number of tales of publishers showing signs of Covid publication fatigue, as if we have somehow done enough or that there is not much new to discover about communication, media and Covid. I beg to differ. The more material we have, the more we can hope to understand. I would argue that the breadth of studies contained within this book furnishes insights into an ongoing literature of 'stories from the Covid battlefield' and are of great value, particularly as they have been written and published at a time when the pandemic is still with us. They may provide grist for critical future comparisons. In fact, one day, when the world can finally feel confident that this pandemic is over, it would be interesting to do a follow-up volume. To pose questions about how the positions and approaches adopted in this book might have changed. To ask what researchers would do differently if they were able to plan their endeavours with the luxury of time and hindsight. And, critically, to better understand how communication and media can help us when, sadly not *if*, the next pandemic hits.

## Author

Dr Rod Lamberts is Deputy Director of the Australian National Centre for the Public Awareness of Science (CPAS) at the Australian National University. He has 25 years experience as a science communication practitioner and researcher and

designed and delivered some of the first university science communication courses in Australia. Rod has provided science communication advice to a wide variety of private and public science-related agencies in Australia and overseas (including the CSIRO, UNESCO & APPEA) and is a regular public commentator on science, science communication, and science and public policy. When not lurking at the ANU, he can be heard around the ABC radio network doing things like Research Filter and Nightlife, read in places like The Conversation, and every week on The Wholesome Show podcast.



[rod.lamberts@anu.edu.au](mailto:rod.lamberts@anu.edu.au).

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