



Beyond Western perspectives: inclusive insights to decolonise and transform science communication

Reviewed Book

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RACE AND SOCIOCULTURAL INCLUSION IN SCIENCE COMMUNICATION:
INNOVATION, DECOLONISATION, AND TRANSFORMATION.
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Reviewed by

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Abstract

"Race and Socio-Cultural Inclusion in Science Communication", edited by Elizabeth Rasekoala, challenges Eurocentric hegemony and advocates for inclusivity in science communication. Through insightful contributions from diverse authors, it calls for action to decolonise and transform science communication.

Keywords

History of public communication of science; Science communication in the developing world; Social inclusion

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After finishing my UK-based master's degree in science communication in 2016, I returned to Egypt to apply my new knowledge in science communication practice. I quickly realized that many of the skills and approaches taught abroad did not apply in my home country due to differences in social and cultural practices. This made me realise that Western perspectives still dominate science communication and significantly affect science communication practitioners in the Global South.

Reading "Race and Sociocultural Inclusion in Science Communication: Innovation, Decolonisation, and Transformation" gave me new insights and ideas for contributing to a more inclusive and diverse science communication future.

The book is edited by Elizabeth Rasekoala, the President of African Gong: the Pan-African Network for the Popularization of Science and Technology and Science Communication. She is joined by 30 contributing authors mainly from the Global South, thereby providing a platform for marginalized voices and diverse and inclusive narratives.

Through a comprehensive examination of race and sociocultural inclusion in science communication, this book challenges existing narratives and advocates for transformation. Various chapters highlight diverse approaches to innovation and decolonisation of science communication and explore often-overlook contributions to science communication from the Global South. Regarding decolonising science communication, the book further deconstructs Eurocentric approaches and redefines what it means. Notably, the authors provide examples of how the history of science communication should be rewritten to recognise neglected non-western narratives.

In Chapter 10 (with the title 'Falling from Normalcy'), Mohamed Belhorma, a museum and science outreach professional, offers a profound critique on the decolonisation of museums and science centres within the broader context of decolonising science communication. Through dissecting the concept of 'normalcy', where the 'normal' is perceived as what can be ideal or morally approved as opposed to what is considered to be 'abnormal', it was found to be defined according to the dominant culture shaped mainly by colonialism and imperialism. Therefore, the superiority of the coloniser's science and culture, as well as ignorance of non-Western perspectives and contributions, have become unchallenged norms, leading to neglecting the acknowledgement of the unseen biases in how science is communicated. This has made normality, norms, and normativity a blind spot in the decolonisation of science communication.

The author illustrates the complexities of decolonising science communication within museums and science centres through various case studies, including the Royal Ontario Museum's 'In the Heart of Africa' exhibition. He shows how well-intentioned efforts can fall short if they fail to address and dismantle deeply entrenched colonial perspectives adequately. Furthermore, he examines how popular culture, collective memory, and the perceptions of identity and otherness, particularly among non-Western populations, are impacted by colonial narratives. He argues that educational curricula, media channels, literature, and cultural archives have all promoted these narratives. Therefore, he emphasizes the urgent need for transformative decolonization in museums and science centres, which involves not only the physical act of returning looted artefacts but, more critically, the challenge of the existing 'normal' narratives through re-examining, re-interpretation, and re-definition as crucial components of the decolonization process.

Another insightful example of how approaches to decolonizing science communication could be transformed is Chapter 13, which focuses on China's first notebook encyclopaedia as a science communication text. It demonstrates how a 10-century-old text from Chinese literature could be perceived as a science communication text and the implications of this for the history of science communication, where the predominant narrative confirms that communicating science is a modern Western enterprise. "Meng Hsi Pi T'an" (Brush Talks from Dream Brook), a notebook written by the Chinese polymath Shen Kua, sometimes called "China's greatest scientist", is an early example of an encyclopaedic approach that includes a broad range of knowledge. The authors argue that this text can be a concrete example for disseminating scientific and technical expertise to a diverse non-specialist audience, where the style and the accessibility of this

work, besides its content, adopted a more inclusive narrative approach which challenges ancient and present-day norms of science communication.

At the conclusion of this book, Rasekoala re-emphasizes the need to address the 'Global North-South' gap in order to advance a 'global' science communication through decolonization, inclusivity and equity, and mutual learning. She argues that challenging the Eurocentric dominance that has been normalized in science communication and recognizing non-western knowledge communication contributions that have been systematically marginalized in contemporary science communication should be the foundations for transforming science communication. This will require a multifaceted approach involving efforts to transcend divisions and recognise overlooked contributions and new and creative approaches to inclusive collaborations and capacity building, informed and guided by diversity and cultural plurality. We need to ensure that the decolonization of science communication will not be another Western enterprise.

Finally, this book calls for a 'brave new world' of global science communication where diversity, inclusion, and equity are significant indicators of excellence.

I highly recommend this book as a source of inspiration for science communication researchers and practitioners to advance diversity and inclusivity in our field and for science communication educators to ensure that these principles guide science communication teaching for future generations of science communicators.

Author

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