



LETTER

A response to “Book Review: Palgrave Handbook of Science and Health Journalism”

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Abstract

This response addresses George Claassen’s review of *The Palgrave Handbook of Science and Health Journalism*. The review raises several salient points; however, the biggest criticism of this work arises from a misunderstanding of the purpose of the Palgrave Handbook series. We wholeheartedly agree that there are lessons for the field of science communication. Engaging with more diverse perspectives and adopting a global lens for exploration of science and health journalism are priorities for the field. These are common themes in the Handbook, which we believe is still a useful resource to help facilitate these much-needed explorations.

Keywords

Science and media; Health communication

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George Claassen's review of our Palgrave Handbook of Science and Health Journalism raises important issues. As academics, critical and constructive reviews of our work are expected and welcomed. Certainly, we cannot ask others to be reflexive and not turn that same lens on ourselves. We agree with some of the points raised but note that some of the criticism is based on an incomplete understanding of the context and purpose of the text.

Claassen's review laments the lack of practitioners contributing to this text, asserting that the overt academic focus of the text is its greatest weakness and "flies in the face of the book's title". The purpose of the Palgrave Handbook series is to present "high-quality, *original reference works* that bring together specially-commissioned chapters, cutting-edge *research*, and the latest *review articles* in their fields... Handbooks provide an unparalleled overview of *a specific field of research*, while also setting the agenda for future directions of the discipline" [Palgrave Macmillan, 2025, *emphasis added*]. When Walsh-Childers was initially contacted by Palgrave to lead this book, the explicit expectation was that it would capture the latest research and set the agenda for future research in the discipline. We agree that having a text drawing upon the expertise and insight from science journalists around the world would be an excellent and much-needed contribution. It was not the purpose of this book.

In his rather quantitative assessment of our text, Claassen recounts the geographical spread of our contributing authors. As he notes himself, a place of employment does not necessarily reflect cultural background. Focusing on the institutional geography obscures — and ignores — the identities of the authors and their professional histories. Those who may be working in Northern Hemisphere institutions now have not necessarily always been there, nor may those countries be their area of academic expertise or focus. The front matter of texts also tells only part of the story of a book's development. When the introduction to the text was written, we had two African scholars contributing a chapter. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, they had to withdraw from the project, which was unfortunately too late into the production timeline to allow a replacement contribution to be secured. Perhaps we should have updated the introductory chapter, but we stand by our assertion that this book draws from as global a body of work as possible.

We wholeheartedly agree with Claassen's argument that there is a wealth of knowledge and expertise in Africa and throughout the world. This is a key reason why we specifically exhorted our contributing authors to draw upon research from as broad a global pool as possible. As other contributors to this journal have rightly pointed out, to transform how we think about and practice a field like science communication — and by extension or in parallel, science journalism — we need to present perspectives from academics and practitioners to facilitate mutual learning between countries in the Global North and the Global South [Rasekoala, 2023]. This means enacting epistemic inclusion, embodying a decolonial framework [Finlay et al., 2021], and enabling a greater flow of information between groups to foster greater sharing of knowledge [Shaheed & Mazibrada, 2021].

We encourage readers to explore the reference lists of each chapter in the Handbook and to use these to develop and support their own work. We are proud of the diversity of the book, reflected through the specific cultural identities of the authors (not their employers) and the breadth of research and examples provided in each chapter. The Handbook itself is not perfect; research never is. Each piece of work is presented as a platform or a provocation to be replicated, tested and improved. This Handbook is no exception. We echo Claassen's hope that science communication researchers will meaningfully explore global phenomena

and do so using a truly global lens. We hope and we believe that this book provides a starting point for that exploration.

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