

Science Communication in the Time of COVID-19

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When we first conceptualized this special issue, we wanted to put together articles that represented a critical examination of communication during a pandemic. This idea came at a time when a variety of government agencies and special interest groups kept calling for “better science communication”, “more facts and less emotions”, “trusting scientists”, and “putting the experts in charge”. While these statements are good in their intent, they also assume that simply adding more facts, making science more visible, and putting scientists in leadership positions will automatically result in positive changes. Communication scholarship has long spoken out about the lack of nuance of these assumptions: these assumptions about human behavior place priority in the creation of messages, rather than in understanding the diverse audiences that receive them.

This issue represents research that adds to the growing body of knowledge that comprises science communication today: that of critically examining how different groups understand science and make sense of their environment, and that of doing away with the assumption of “if you build it, they will come” (“If you write it, they will understand”).

This issue’s journal articles and essays join the chorus of science communication scholars everywhere: research first, base action on the research findings after.

This issue is divided into three major portions: the first explores the intersections of communication and education. Local scholars looked at pedagogy and computer-mediated communication, and how students from different educational levels are making sense of the online learning setup. Of note are “Communicating with students under the modular distance modality in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic” and “Students’ online learning and its challenges: Exploring educational inequalities during the COVID pandemic”, both of which explore how our students are learning new ways of coping while being immersed in a digital world in which they are supposedly natives.

The second portion of this issue teases apart the many threads of communicating with diverse groups during a pandemic, be they broadcast or social media, or even lines of communication by the Philippine government. For example, “Filipino Resilience Cannibalism: A textual analysis on the co-

optation of Filipino resilience vis-a-vis neoliberalism in ABS-CBN, GMA, and Inquirer.net Facebook posts during the COVID-19 pandemic” looks at social media and its construction of resilience during the crisis, while “Critical Discourse Analysis of ABS-CBN’s Coverage of Duterte’s Public Addresses on COVID-19 Response” homes in on the Philippine president’s articulations of the government’s work. “Health Risk and Crisis Communication on COVID-19 in Marikina and Pasig: The Case of Two Philippine Cities” also critically examines how local governments work through the challenges posed by an international crisis.

The third portion of this issue looks at popular culture, and how our entertainment media reflect our current realities. “Love Yourself, ARMY: Participatory Fandom and Agency During the Pandemic” discusses the BTS fandom and its responses to pandemic restrictions, while “Emerging Cinema Quarantine: Alternative Film Practice and Narratives in the time of the Pandemic” examines the creative output of an industry that is nevertheless productive despite being constrained by a lack of physical, interactive spaces.

This issue moves from the classroom, to the community, to a larger public sphere. This movement reflects how work in science communication has progressed: from the field’s assumptions of the world as a classroom to be a taught science, to a recognition of multiple audiences, to a critical examination of larger bodies of media.

I am glad and honored to have been a part of this issue, and to contribute to research in science communication. Ours is a time unlike any other, and it calls for a critical examination unlike any we have done before. I hope that this special issue is a first step toward more research that truly asks, questions, and critiques.



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