
Book Review

Science Communication

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Boykoff, M.T. (2011). *Who Speaks for the Climate? Making Sense of Media Reporting on Climate Change*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. 228 pp. ISBN 978-0521133050

Reviewed by: Liisa Antilla (www.oneblueworld.blogspot.com), Independent Geographer, Seattle, WA, USA

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The choices we make now, as global citizens, in attending to the climate crisis will have profound ramifications for present and future natural systems, species, and societies. Although the international scientific community reached consensus on anthropogenic climate change decades ago, we founder in our efforts to meaningfully address this pressing and wicked problem. Political polarization, economic concerns, and social apathy impede our path. Moreover, an aggressive “climate countermovement,” a social network including high-profile and influential figures, exploits the media landscape in order to propagate disinformation and harass scientists and climate policy proponents.

In *Who Speaks for the Climate*, Maxwell Boykoff casts a wide net in pursuit of answering the question, “Who—through media traction—become[s] authorized to make sense of, translate and speak on behalf of climate change?” (p. 167). Employing a holistic approach in his exploration, the author reaches across borders and media forms and draws from social theory, polling results, and a deep interdisciplinary pool of climate-related research. Blending in data from his years of observing linguistic strategies on global warming, Boykoff delivers a clear picture of the heterogeneous dimensions of supranational climate—and anti-science—rhetoric that constructs public (mis)understanding on climate change.

Boykoff’s insights include the reoccurring problems of media “conflation” of the science, economics, and politics of climate and failure to provide context from the large body of scientific understanding. The core strengths of this book are a comprehensive overview of the history of climate journalism; deep analyses of a broad range of media formats—including newspapers, magazines, documentaries, television, radio, and web-based sources; and the unpacking of recent case studies involving climate news “controversies.”

As the new paradigm of a rapidly changing climate system gains greater recognition, “the discourse of climate change” is being studied by a growing number of geographically diffuse scholars and research bodies seeking improved tools for climate communication. There is now a solid multicultural effort to improve dialogue among journalists, policy makers, climate scientists, and the public. While the author’s writing style makes this book primarily accessible to researchers at the nexus of climate and communication, this work will be of interest to any engaged observers of, as submitted by the author, “mass media [influence upon] who has a say and how” (p. 76) on climate.

Ultimately, Boykoff achieves his goal to “help make sense of how media . . . frame truth claims, . . . political contexts influence such framing processes, and . . . amplified voices . . . shape . . . interpretations of . . . climate challenges” (p. 168). One of the important takeaway messages is that “differential access to media outlets is a product of differences in power” (p. 159). Transforming these intransigent power paradigms into a force for progress on climate policy may be one of the greatest struggles of this generation. One thing is certain—our climate system won’t speak for itself.