
MASS APPEAL

Communicating Policy Ideas in Multiple Media

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FOREWORD

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Silence.

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I was a 27-year-old recent PhD graduate who spent the last decade as a newspaper reporter and television production freelancer. I had just published a book on one of the most divisive, misunderstood populations in the Western world. Yet the reaction to it can be summarized in one word: silence. No phone calls from the UK Home Office or the US State Department soliciting my expertise. No inspired efforts by civil society organizations. No newspaper columns debating my most controversial ideas.

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I had spent six months fully immersed in Muslim communities in London and Madrid, shortly after each city had been rocked by terrorist attacks that killed and injured hundreds of people and inspired a wave of Islamic extremism. Using my investigative journalism skills, I had managed to interview members of an extremist organization and take notes during their meetings. I had invested countless hours over a three-year period, researching Western

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Muslim politics and writing up my findings. I even had a stylized book jacket that friends likened to a movie poster. The whole package was published by a highly reputable press in the thick of rampant Islamophobia, paranoia about Islamic extremism, and unease about immigration into Europe and the United States. As far as research goes for a social scientist, I thought I had struck gold.

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And yet silence. My then novel policy ideas of embracing mosques as partners in anti-terrorism strategies; of eliminating random Muslim profiling, stop-and-search and other discriminatory enforcement tactics; and of focusing terrorism prevention on second-generation, immigrant-origin Muslims frustrated by democracy and concerned with the development of their identity all seemed to fall on deaf ears.

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Suddenly, I was the one who was frustrated with democracy. Where was its meritocracy? Where were the channels open to new ideas and voices? Where was the public desire for reform? Why was nobody listening? At first, I was resigned to accept the advice I might have otherwise shared with my alienated subjects: democracy is flawed, and sometimes your ideas become lost in the crowd.

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However, I also knew that democracy is highly subject to our ability to inject our personal preferences into public discourse—broadly, strategically, and effectively. And upon reflection, I failed to use many of the skills I gained during my years as a journalist. Experiences in print, radio, and television journalism taught me how to communicate to broad and diverse audiences and readerships. And yet, I never really employed those skills as well as I could have to communicate the ideas I developed from a book project that required far more effort than any article I had ever written for a newspaper.

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Determined not to let this happen again, I dedicated myself to integrating these skills to share my future research—to communicate my policy ideas effectively in multiple media. I now use them all the time in order to ensure that every major piece of research I undertake can be consumed and understood by academics, policymakers, and the public alike. And along the way, I have encountered many other public policy professionals—researchers as well as activists, advocates, bureaucrats, and officials—who shared my earlier frustrations and wanted to broaden their reach as well.

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Public policy education and training are oriented around the development of critical and innovative ideas about how to improve governance and make society better. However, they undervalue one of the most important tools needed to translate policy proposals into action: the ability to communicate ideas broadly, strategically, and effectively. This is the primary objective of *Mass Appeal*. This book is a primer for students, researchers, and policy professionals who want to turn their analyses and memos into clear, persuasive campaigns—which may be reporting their findings or advocating a perspective. In politics, rarely do influencers have the time to read tomes about policy. Key decisions are often made on the basis of media campaigns and digestible snippets. It is simply not enough to develop policy ideas: you must be able to distribute them effectively. As Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder show in their seminal work *News That Matters*,¹ issues that receive more coverage in the national news become more important to the public. In other words, news media has “agenda-setting” power.

1. Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (2010). *News that matters: Television and American opinion*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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This text is designed as a practical introduction for students and professionals who want their research, analysis, and ideas to hold greater mass appeal but who have limited experience with communications media. For students, the book accompanies broader public policy textbooks that more comprehensively review the state of knowledge about policymaking processes and analysis. For both students and professionals, the book complements the expertise that you have developed over the course of your studies and careers in certain issue areas or industrial sectors. These classroom and workplace experiences prepare us for policy creation, management, and analysis; but they do not offer guidance in the basic products of political communication across multiple media. If you read the chapters that follow and apply the lessons to your own work, you will become more confident in writing succinctly and engaging in public speaking.

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Chapter 1 explains the rationale for this book and introduces the indispensability of pithy statements to clear communication. Chapters 2 through 8 each discuss the fundamentals of a specific medium of communication. Structured consistently, they begin with an outline of the **principles** underpinning the medium, its recommended structure, and the nature of its target audience or readership. Each chapter then quotes complementary advice from expert **practitioners** who I specifically commissioned to present their remarks. And finally, each chapter offers examples that are **paragons** of good communication. I focus on examples from the American context, but the lessons are intended to be applicable in the policy environments of other democracies as well. Chapter 9 concludes with sensible criteria for determining what media are most appropriate for reaching different types of policy goals.

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Throughout the book, I try to practice what I preach. I try to write succinctly—offering the most essential information, carefully selecting my language for clarity, and striving for mass appeal.