

Summary: People don't respond always to facts, here's how to tell compelling stories (based on the literature)

Sword in hand, gazing at the evil grin of Lord Misinformation of Fakenewsland, our hero takes one last desperate swing before she sinks to the ground, exhausted after a long fight on the hills of Twitterlandia. Where on earth are our heroes of science communication when we need them?

Those who communicate should more often than not consider themselves as storytellers – this is the main message of this article. Interestingly, there's a „science“ to this as well – the article draws on a range of source to back up the claim that narrative science communication is not just more compelling – it's also more effective!

The drawbacks of the (knowledge) deficit model are well-known by now: communicating evidence is important, but insufficient on its own. People won't be persuaded to vaccinate their children by looking at statistics: but they might be if those statistics are interwoven in a captivating story.

This is particularly relevant for policy, where great evidence is often not used – this has a name: the problem of utilization. Hot tip: don't ignore the belief system of the recipient of your science advice! We even know why this is happening - a key driver that has been identified is called „biased assimilation“, the tendency of people to seek out things that fit their world-view. The authors say: based on all we know from this literature, it is high time to end our love affair with expertise and objective facts and instead engage in better storytelling, using the narrative policy framework (NPF) – a veritable scientific framework in itself.

After doing so, we know: also science communicators need a setting, a character, a plot and a moral. The article analyzes two newspaper accounts anti-vaxxers (Dr. Wakefield or another celebrity), evaluating its structure and highlighting how reputable scientific background information is mixed throughout. Arguably, those stories work best if there are not just villains and victims, but also relatable heroes and solutions provided. All this works for science communicators who have identified a clear „problem“ that they want to solve. The authors don't say, however, how to deal with situations in which the science isn't settled – here, not even a good hero or heroine comes to the rescue.

--

Summary: How can we use the 'science of stories' to produce persuasive scientific stories?
Michael D. Jones & Deserai Anderson Crow (2017))

- The (knowledge) deficit model is outdated (people don't just respond to facts!)
- Beliefs and emotions matter
- Science communicators should see themselves as storytellers, helping people connect with problems on a more human level (here's some persuasion scholarship that back us up on this, and here's a step-by-step guide)