

Why don't you publish your research here?

Justin Gest author of [Mass Appeal: Communicating Policy Ideas in Multiple Media](#) asks why not publish your research outside of academic outlets? And, suggests academic institutions need to engage more creatively with an increasingly diverse range of multimedia, if they are to create the change their research promises.

Seriously. Why don't you publish your research here?

University researchers' decisions about how to communicate their most important findings reveal a fundamental moral hazard: We are not incentivized to inform society and maximise our public impact.

Every week, countless important ideas — some of which have the potential to change minds, influence policy choices, or alter the course of business — are communicated in research journals and books that are almost exclusively read by other researchers. This is effective for the spread of knowledge to other researchers, but it does little to bridge the communication gap between the people who produce knowledge and the people who may put it to use.

It is this gap that has motivated the UK's research quality assessors to ascribe greater importance to impact in its REF reviews of British universities every seven years — the most recent of which is currently underway.

Worse, however, today there is an emerging credibility gap too. Many members of the public do not trust or sufficiently appreciate the rigor and independence of academic and peer-reviewed research, even when it is disseminated. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this held life-and-death consequences, as some people distrusted public health advisories and now distrust the efficacy of vaccines.

Through the most optimistic lens, the public has stopped blindly accepting the words they read and hear and are more critical of authorities—business leaders, public officials, and scientists alike. The public has become more sensitive to personal bias and aware that its contamination reaches the highest echelons of our societies. Readers and listeners are wary of people's personal agendas and how their desire to influence may motivate them to misinform. If everyone is out for themselves, it is implicitly thought, they are accountable to no one. This can be a healthy form of skepticism.

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Far more pessimistically, sinister influences in our societies have manipulated this skepticism to undermine trust in sources that actually *are* objective and accountable—to certifying agencies, ombudspersons, external evaluators, and peer reviewers. The manipulators have generated conspiracy theories, myths, and faux science that validate people's unfounded suspicions and sustain their convenient truths. And readers and listeners are often eager accomplices. Most people limit themselves to certain information outlets that reinforce their worldviews. Rather than read broadly, readers read deeply—if they take the time to read at all. Reinforced by social media platforms that cater to isolating consumption habits, different constituencies have grown to occupy different subcultures with competing conventional wisdoms.



Naturally, there are two sides to this story.

Many scientists, experts, and authorities will say that we are the innocent victims of these insidious developments—that we have continued with unbiased, scientific investigations in a world that no longer values our efforts. And to be fair, there are now ever more platforms for news media and commentary competing for the public's attention. There is a premium on short, easy-to-understand, "[click bait](#)" — which doesn't usually lend itself to complicated or technical research.

However, scientists, experts, and authorities played a role in making this world; and we have a role to play in unmaking it. Indeed, a principal reason for the increasing indistinguishability of expertise is that we experts have failed to regularly publicize our methods and ideas to fellow citizens and decision makers. With some exceptions, we don't communicate to the public effectively or we don't even try. And yet, amidst the cacophony of media voices, there is an intensifying appetite for expertise to clarify the signal from the noise.

Most academics, willingly or not, assign value exclusively to the publication of scientifically derived facts in highly specialized journals. These journal articles are often written in a manner illegible to even an informed layperson and then made practically inaccessible behind a costly pay-wall. We have so specialized into narrow subfields that we are unable to speak across them. In some cases, informally, researchers' reputations can be harmed and they may lose professional credibility if they focus too much on public impact. To be a public intellectual is in too many cases to not be an academic.

What Tom Nichols has called the "death of expertise" has been one of self-inflicted wounds.

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Meanwhile, the creators of "alternative facts" and "fake news" succinctly package their ideas into slick videos and campaigns with clear formatting and persuasive prose that is accessible to all. In this world of influence, there is no pay-wall, no jargon, and no impact without breadth. There is a meme and pithy slogan.

Thus, the broad-minded share their ideas narrowly, while the narrow-minded share their ideas broadly.

To remedy this paradox, we must complement the generation of new knowledge with its impactful dissemination. We must value and pursue multimedia outreach to connect with non-experts as well, so why not choose to publish your research in a blog or other alternative format?

This does not mean that we must abandon conventional means of peer review and dissemination to other experts in our respective fields. Rather, it means that we must recognize that these conventional outlets are insufficient alone, and not conducive to [mass appeal](#).

Just as new developments in scientific methods and knowledge require us to adapt our skill set, this new moment of informational instability requires us to find new ways to distinguish our work and persuade our fellow citizens of its use.

Should we choose not to, we “experts” have only ourselves to blame.

*Interested readers can find out more about contributing to the LSE Impact Blog, including our commissioning themes and style guide, [here](#). Readers are also encouraged to explore the LSE's other research blogs, which can be found [here](#). You can also read a review of Justin's book, *Mass Appeal: Communicating Policy Ideas in Multiple Media*, [here](#).*

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, or of the London School of Economics.

Image Credit: LSE Impact Blog.
