Book Review: *Media and communications policy making,* Robert G. Picard

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Abstract

Purpose: This viewpoint paper aims to review the book Media and communications policy-making by Robert G. Picard (Springer International Publishing).

Design/methodology/approach: The paper provides an overview of the book, key messages, arguments, and implications for the future.

Findings: Policy making is of importance since it provides direction, stability, accountability, efficiency, and clarity on how society instructs its institutions and system, in particular those in media and communications, based on the dominant competing political, economical, and cultural environments besides the interests of the varying roleplayers to preserve the public interest. Accordingly, policy-making studies are vital to investigate why and how policies are formulated through decision-making processes in public (domestic, regional, and global) spheres to conform to the values and norms of the affiliated stakeholders.

Practical implications: The insightful book provides an excellent starting point for anyone interested in policy making and learning to find out what has been discussed to date, what has been concluded, and what is possible for further research in the future.

Originality/value: The value of this book rests with the wide range of arguments it covers, and the willingness of the author to share his knowledge and experiences with policy-making and governance. It is illustrated with graphs and charts and the author supports his opinions and arguments with real-world evidence and examples besides. The book is accurately referenced, too.

Keywords: Policy Making, Policy Making Environment, Regulation, Governance, Media and Communications

About the Author

Robert G. Picard is an American professor at universities in the US and Europe and also among prominent specialists on media economics and government communications policies who seeks to improve performance and respond to challenges in the media environment. Besides being the author and editor of tens of books, he has been the editor of the Journal of Media Business Studies and The Journal of Media Economics. He serves on the editorial boards of numerous other journals including the Reuters Institute, University of Oxford, the Information Society Project at Yale Law School, and the Royal Society of Arts. As a leading authority in the field, he has also consulted for governments and international organizations in North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Purpose of the Book

The textbook is unique because it deals exclusively with the subject of policy-making, how it takes shape and then is applied to media and communications.

Its scope and focus are strictly on why policy issues are raised and how the environment affects the policy-making process and institutions both at domestic and international levels. Additionally, it concentrates on policy structures, processes and actions, the resulting outcomes, and how these consequences force changes in the real world.

The book seeks to explain the linkage between "policy studies approaches, the concepts and methods they employ, the dynamic environment and the contested interests in the policy-making" (P. 9).

Structure of the Book

The book contains three main parts: "contents and means of policy-making" (four chapters), "three levels of policy making and policy reviews" (three chapters), and "advocacy and future research" (four chapters). The glossary, the bibliography, and the index sections follow the named parts.

Each chapter includes sections and subsections depending on the provided content but the author wraps each and all of the chapters up by four fixed sections of "Final Words", "Chapter Summary", "Discussion Points" and "Bibliography".

In addition to the 11 chapters, the book comes with an extensive alphabetical glossary including the definitions of up to 110 words and terms in addition to a listing of above 560 references. These make the 279 pages, including the index.

Summary of Contents

Chapter I

The chapter talks about the necessity of studying policy making, its definition and boundaries in relation to other domains, how policies can be developed, and what their potential and practical impacts on societies and individuals can be. Defining the pivotal terms, approaches, and processes for understanding the concept, the chapter concentrates on the overlap between the western-centric media and communication policy and other fields as well as the application of policy making to media and communications. The author distinguishes fundamental and commonly used terms of policy, law, regulation, and intervention and delineates the media and communications policy field by differentiating media policy from communications policy, information policy, and telecommunications policy. In his opinion, compared with policy for other industries, media and communications policy and policy making is involved with various social, cultural,

and economic issues and can be conceptualized as process and stages. Picard constructs linear and cyclical policy process models to describe typical activities in the policy-making procedure but asserts that the job can be more dynamic than what he presents. Noting that policy-making is a political act and has roots in empiricist views, Picard also discusses policy principles as the combination of values and norms that address public value.

Chapter II

The second chapter elaborates on the environment, structure, and locales in which policy making takes place and names governance (authoritarian or democratic), social (business groups, advocacy groups, cultural groups, and religious groups), and economic (market economies, mixed economies, and market and planned economies) institutions as the common major institutions influencing the policy-making job in countries. Explaining the levels and powers of governance involved in policy-making, Picard underlines that the process takes place in an environment in which the political influences are created based on the power relations and interactions among various agencies including those independent, legislative, and judicial ones.

Chapter III

The third chapter refers back to the policy process models and stages, previously discussed in the book. It seeks to discover where, how, and by who the policy actions can be initiated. The chapter defines policy making as a transparent process that can be initiated when interest groups and stakeholders exercise power due to their requirements and compete for gaining attention to their intended policy issues within the existing policy frameworks.

Chapter IV

The chapter talks about policy mechanisms and tools used by policy-makers when they decide to meddle with the behavioral concepts of firms, individuals, incorporates and etc. They try to create policy trajectories based on the dominant environment and discourse and formulate long-lasting legal foundations and systematic policy principles. The author asserts that the proper selection of such tools and mechanisms by policymakers would guarantee the success of the tailored policies.

Chapter V

The fifth chapter deals with policy-making at the global level i.e. the practice of international laws by intergovernmental organizations to do global governance while preserving the national sovereignty of states through making collective public decisions. It highlights the role of small countries and nongovernmental organizations in the process as well and sheds light on the major challenges posed to global governance.

Chapter VI

Policy making at a regional level, as the author describes in chapter six, includes cooperative ties among countries on continents, subcontinents, and a small grouping of states, in the forms of bilateral or multinational intergovernmental cooperation. The process includes a higher level of engagement of nongovernmental organizations, compared to what is practiced at the global level. Discussing factors influencing the strength of regional governance organizations and their policy activities and choices, the chapter goes on with a focus on regional cooperation and governance in the media and communications in Africa, Asia and Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, Central and South Africa and the Caribean.

In chapters five and six, the author discusses how countries play to their strengths and exercise power in competing with each other. He notes that governance is more evident in communication policy than in media policy and accordingly underlines the importance of technological cooperation among countries as a vital part of governance. He asserts that the needs and priorities of nations play a pivotal role in their decisions about cooperating with their counterparts.

Chapter VII

Stressing the role of individual states in governing media and communications, despite the ongoing globalization and regionalizations in this sector, the seventh chapter discusses comparative policy-making and outcomes among countries. It investigates the influences on domestic policy outcomes in both democratic and autocratic countries besides the roles of heads of states, authorities, governments, ministers, administrative agencies, institutions, and individuals on domestic processes and practices.

Chapter VIII

This chapter is an effort to demonstrate how, at the beginning stages of building policy process models, strategy-making tools, strategic analyses (including PEST, SWOT, and risk analyses), and modeling approaches (such as predictive and causal models) facilitate the evidence-based policy analysis processes to reach decision-making.

Chapter IX

Bringing into focus the final stages of the policy-making process, the chapter discusses the evaluation and examination procedures, which come after the implementation of the made policies. The evaluation seeks to investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of a shaped policy for assessing its ensued consequences, identifying its probable drifts, carrying out the required modifications, and finally identifying its failures to decide whether to continue or terminate it. The examination stage includes applying methods and disciplinary approaches for pursuing policy studies such as elite interviewing, policy tracing, cost-benefit analysis, legal research, etc.

Chapter X

The chapter is devoted to the concept of advocacy as a crucial part of the public sphere and social decision-making to achieve public support for the adopted policies and enhance their participation in policy-making process. The author elaborates on the role of advocacy networks and coalitions and talks about their typical activities to develop public support and awareness for the raised policies. Admitting that media and communication graduates are not prepared to play roles in advocacy efforts, the authors suggest that more related skills and ethics, as well as law and regulatory coursework, are required to be taught at universities to let the scholars behave ethically in this regard.

Chapter XI

Titled "Looking Forward", the three-page chapter is the summing-up of the book that leaves the readers in no doubt about its comprehensiveness. It truly demonstrates Picard's knowledge of the subject area and can be considered as a thorough and systematic review of the made arguments in previous chapters but with a prospective point of view. Picard stresses the creation of the new media and communications environment which is altering global governance and public policies. He calls for better research methods and more comparative research to boost the efficiency and effectiveness of policy tools and processes and to impede future policy failures.

Critical Analysis of the Book

In the textbook, Picard notably parades his knowledge of the subject area. It cannot be claimed that the book comes with a new slant on policy-making but it has for sure a clear-cut and well-organized structure that gives the readers the chance to follow the intended argument and navigate the text. The author has successfully established a basic framework for the intricate and yet edgeless domain of policy-making. Although he admits that some aspects of the concept may throw the readers into confusion, he seeks to embrace a global and analytical perspective on how policymaking takes place.

The author sets the scope of the book and enters the realm of policy-making by examining its various aspects. Describing the concept as an interdisciplinary one, he seeks to adopt a holistic approach to discuss it. The first chapter seems an engaging introduction to the book by which the author hooks the readers by establishing his tone, illustrating the main arguments, and making his contribution to this field of study.

To decrease the chances that the facts or ideas are wrongly applied to real-life situations, the book contains graphical representations of the presented ideas and provides the readers with some examples from the real world to make its statements clearer and bolster its main ideas.

To provide an in-depth understanding of the arguments, each chapter contains supplementary content. Presented in gray boxes, this content helps readers with a better understanding of the made discussions and provides them with additional or complementary but directly relevant information. Accordingly, the book comes with a high level of content readability. To aid the reader's understanding, the arguments are backed up by evidence and are notably coherent and written in a logical order.

Ideas and suggestions for further research are proposed under "Discussion Points" and in form of questions at the end of each chapter. Built upon the discussed arguments, the questions deal with the limitations, the probable unanswered aspects of the raised issues as well as the potential topics for future studies. By such provoking questions, Picard makes readers produce analyses of the issues or problems rather than confining themselves to the provided descriptions and also allows them to examine the components of the brought-up researchable questions.

Reviewing the book, no grammatical mistakes were observed but a misspelling of the SWOT analysis (mistakenly written as SWAT) was found on page 165.

A brief review of the list of the works cited in the bibliographies attached to each chapter confirms that the discussed arguments come from reputable sources and the made claims are backed up. The references, the majority of which were published from 2000 onwards, ensure the up-to-dateness of discussions and the integrity of his writing process and for sure, enhance the credibility of the content he provides.

The book's content is clear, concise, planned, focussed, logical, sequential, balanced, well-organized, and action-oriented as well. Although the author has a formal tone and style, his writing is not complicated and does not include long sentences and complicated vocabulary. It is evident that the author has a great deal of experience and engagement in the area of policy-making and through this textbook is contributing to the media policy research field.

Recommendations

This informative book is a useful resource for all those concerned with the issue of policy-making such as policy scholars, students, advocates as well as advanced undergraduate, and postgraduate students in the field. It addresses those who look for greater uptake of academic arguments about policy-making and those who are tasked with directing public policy. It makes the readers able to understand how social, economic,

cultural, and political conditions change through time and how public policies are required to evolve in order to meet the ongoing needs of a changing society.

References

Picard, R. G. (2020). *Media and communications policy-making*. Springer International Publishing.

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