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SOLVING SPACE'S NARRATIVE PROBLEM

Abstract

Space has a narrative problem. Science communication efforts targeting the general public are often restricted to the standard space drawcards of beauty, mystery, and novelty. While this is effective for a captive audience, it forgets the practical proclivities of those uninitiated to, unengaged with, or unconvinced by space activities. Space needs an engaging, humanising narrative with a clear message that relates directly to this audience.

This paper considers *Without Space* as an effective and practical narrative for communicating the importance of space activities to the general public.

First, this paper outlines the *Without Space* narrative. The *Without Space* study, which examined what would happen if access to satellites was suddenly lost, was conducted by a team of international space professionals, academics, and students at the International Space University's Southern Hemisphere Space Studies Program (SH-SSP) in 2019. The original results of this SH-SSP study were presented in an interactive presentation at IAC 2019. This new paper begins by summarising the results of this study: it covers potential outage scenarios, the effect of an outage on space exploration, position, navigation, and timing (PNT), remote sensing, and telecommunications satellites, and the consequent impact over time to daily life on Earth from commercial, economic, ethical, legal, political, societal, and technological perspectives.

Second, this paper explores the *Without Space* narrative in the context of storytelling and risk/disaster communication. Science communication through storytelling is consistently shown as a highly effective method of education. A good story engages audiences, eases their understanding of complex topics, and makes the abstract personal. However, when attempting to highlight why space activities matter and elicit support for space activities, space communication often suffers from impersonality and does not connect with the disengaged. *Without Space* presents a compelling argument for 'why space' for the general public, including governments and decision makers. This paper proposes that employing a narrative of loss—essentially, a disaster story—can solve the inhuman issue faced by space communication and make space activities personally urgent to the general public; even those usually disengaged from science and space. Studies in risk and disaster communication and the use of emotion, such as shock, further confirm the potential efficacy of the *Without Space* narrative and informs appropriate communication methods.

Finally, this paper reports on and evaluates initial uses of *Without Space* for public outreach activities and recommends ways forward in communicating this narrative, including methods, target communicators, and target audiences.