

Elihu Katz, Annenberg School

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Elihu Katz

Elihu Katz, a foundational figure in the field of media studies and the distinguished trustee emeritus professor of communication in Penn's Annenberg School for Communication, passed away on December 31. He was 95.

Born in 1926 in Brooklyn, Dr. Katz attended the Yeshivah of Flatbush, where he learned Hebrew at age 6. He graduated from Midwood High School in 1944 and began a BA at Columbia College in Manhattan. His studies were interrupted, however, by a stint in the United States Army from 1944-1946, during which he was trained as a Japanese interpreter at the University of Chicago and stationed briefly overseas. After the war, Dr. Katz returned to Columbia and completed his degree in 1948. He continued at Columbia as a graduate student in sociology, studying with prominent sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton. He received his MA in 1950, writing a thesis called "The Happiness Game," which dealt with fan mail to a radio personality. He also conducted extensive research with Dr. Lazarsfeld on "two-step flow of communication," which posited the then-uncommon idea that discussion with other people was an important component in people's understanding of media.

In 1954, Dr. Katz left the Bureau for Applied Social Research, where he had begun working while at Columbia, to join the University of Chicago's department of sociology. Soon after, in addition to Chicago, Dr. Katz took a post at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1956, where he cofounded the Communications Institute a decade later. He also assumed a role in the mid-1960s at the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research (IIASR). At Chicago, Dr. Katz continued to research personal influence, the interplay between groups of people and messages in media. He co-authored *Medical Innovation: A Diffusion Study* in 1966 and *The Politics of Community Conflict: The Fluoridation Decision* in 1969, both of which studied the influence of medical advertising. Meanwhile, in Israel, he studied the interactions of immigrants with officials like customs workers and bus drivers, co-authoring *Bureaucracy and the Public: A Reader in Official-Client Relations* in 1973. From 1967 to 1969, in the midst of the Six-Day War, Dr. Katz headed Israel's nascent television service. This work later led to Dr. Katz working with and studying the BBC in England.

In 1978, Dr. Katz began teaching at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. His research shifted in the same decade to individual empowerment in relation to mass media, studying the responses of culturally diverse individuals to primetime soap operas (work that was published in 1990 as *The Export of Meaning*). He continued to research the media implications of events on the world stage, writing *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* about Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's 1977 visit to Jerusalem. In the 1990s, Dr. Katz headed the Guttman Institute, which further studied Israelis' responses to social and political events. Also in the early 1990s, Dr. Katz retired from USC and the Hebrew University, and in 1993, he joined the faculty of the Annenberg School at Penn, where he established the post-doctoral Annenberg Scholars Program. While at Penn, Dr. Katz studied diffusion and co-authored *Echoes of Gabriel Tarde: What We Know Better or Different 100 Years Later* in 2014, which built upon a late-19th-century essay by a French sociologist. Dr. Katz retired from Penn the same year and settled in Jerusalem.

In 2018, Dr. Katz received an honorary doctor of humane letters from Penn ([Almanac](https://almanac.upenn.edu/articles/penns-2018-commencement-speaker-and-honorary-degree-recipients) February 6, 2018 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/articles/penns-2018-commencement-speaker-and-honorary-degree-recipients>)), and a colloquium was launched in his honor at the Annenberg School. Also in 2018, Dr. Katz received the prestigious Steven H. Chaffee Career Achievement Award from the International Communication Association. He also received the Israel Prize for social sciences in 1998, and in 2013, an honorary degree from Northwestern University. "He was very much responsible for positioning the field of communication as something that could be studied in the university arena," said Barbie Zelizer, Penn's Raymond Williams Professor of Communication.

Dr. Katz is survived by his wife, Ruth Katz, a musicologist and professor emerita at Hebrew University; and two sons.