BOOK REVIEW   **OPEN ACCESS**

From legacy media to going viral: generational media use and citizen engagement

Robert H. Wicks, Shauna A. Morimoto, and Jan LeBlanc Wicks

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Review

The Book arrives as a timely and comprehensive exploration of the evolving media ecosystem. The book provides an interdisciplinary bridge between traditional mass communication paradigms and emergent digital behaviors. The first chapter draws heavily on Lasswell's and McLuhan's frameworks, arguing that while the one-to-many broadcast model remains relevant, it has been fractured by the many-to-many dynamics of social media. The authors skillfully map out how concepts like gatekeeping, agenda-setting, and framing are being renegotiated in the digital age (p. 8).

The second chapter presents a compelling genealogy of technological innovations from the printing press to radio, television, cable news, and the internet, demonstrating that each communication revolution both displaces and incorporates its predecessor. This diachronic view challenges the "digital exceptionalism" often found in new media discourses. The case study of CNN's coverage of the Gulf War (p. 41) is juxtaposed with the

live-streamed Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, drawing parallels between spectacle and immediacy across eras.

Chapters Four and Five argue that virality is fundamentally about affect, emotion, and networked amplification. Drawing on Jenkins' concept of "spreadability" and Papacharissi's work on "affective publics", the authors position the viral as a site where identity, ideology, and interface collide. This is best illustrated in their analysis of the "Ice Bucket Challenge" and Greta Thunberg's climate activism, both of which went viral but in dramatically different ways. The former relied on gamification and spectacle, while the latter harnessed moral urgency and intergenerational solidarity. By presenting these examples side by side, authors reveal how platform affordances, algorithmic visibility, and user engagement co-construct the viral arc (p. 88). The book is impressive in its breadth. Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the authors incorporate ethnographic interviews with content creators, social media analytics, and textual analysis of news reports (p. 103). Each case study is meticulously crafted, with a keen eye for political economy, media aesthetics, and cultural context.

Chapter Six, which blends data from Facebook's oversight board with critical discourse analysis of viral conspiracy videos. The authors warn against overemphasizing technological determinism, arguing instead that "virality without verification" poses a profound risk to democratic discourse. This concern is echoed throughout the book and positions it within the urgent field of media literacy and civic responsibility. The authors cite the harassment campaigns of Gamergate and the weaponization of memes by far-right groups as evidence that participatory power can also reinforce toxicity and polarization. The book discusses how women of color activists are disproportionately targeted online and how algorithms may reinforce structural inequalities (p. 151). By citing the work of Safiya Umoja Noble and Ruha Benjamin, the authors amplify marginalized perspectives within the media studies canon (p. 155).

Chapter Eight explores the regulatory gaps that have allowed platforms to operate with minimal oversight. They critique Section 230 of the U.S. Communications Decency Act and highlight ongoing efforts by the EU and India to impose content moderation frameworks. The authors call for a "new media ethics" that holds both platforms and users accountable. They advocate for algorithmic transparency, data justice, and equitable representation in content moderation teams. These recommendations are not utopian but grounded in policy proposals and empirical realities, making them valuable to both practitioners and scholars. Each chapter ends with reflective questions, key terms, and discussion prompts that encourage classroom engagement.

Conclusion

The book also addresses global trends, but the empirical focus remains primarily Western, with limited engagement with media ecosystems in the Global South. Given the rise of platforms like WhatsApp in Brazil or WeChat in China, a more geographically diverse set of case studies would have enriched the analysis. The book touches upon AI and deep learning, but it could go further in interrogating how generative AI tools like ChatGPT or Sora are reshaping content creation and journalistic practices. As AI becomes more embedded in media production, future editions could expand this discussion to include epistemological and ontological implications. The authors' critique platform capitalism; they stop short of envisioning alternatives beyond regulatory reform. More engagement with cooperative platforms, public service algorithms, or decentralized networks could have offered a more radical reimagination of the digital public sphere. The book stands as a vital and timely intervention in media scholarship. It combines theoretical sophistication, empirical depth, and pedagogical clarity to examine the ongoing transformation of media landscapes. Its insistence on connecting the dots between legacy and digital, power and participation, structure and agency, makes it an indispensable reading for anyone interested in the future of communication.

3. References

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