Book Review



New New Media. Paul Levinson. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2009. 225 pp.

It's increasingly difficult to keep up with the rapid growth of new forms of communication created by the Internet. Change happens so fast that even a relatively new format—such as Wikipedia, launched in 2001—seems old and familiar just ten years later.

Paul Levinson, an author and professor of communication and media studies at Fordham University, says one characteristic that distinguishes "new new media" from simple "new media" is that in the newer form the consumer is also a producer.

Levinson defines categories of "new new media," noting that the written word plays a role in all forms—print, audio, audio-visual, and photographic. His book provides history and insight into many of those forms, devoting chapters to blogging, YouTube, Wikipedia, Digg, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Second Life, and podcasting. He draws heavily on his own experiences with each of these formats; the index refers to his own blog, Infinite Regress, sixteen times.

Perhaps because of his own experience, his book becomes, at least in part, a how-to resource. His blogging chapter, in particular, provides an easy guide for novices, including spelling out detailed ways to try to make money in the blogo-sphere. Most of these "new new media" formats will not be new to savvy Internet users. However, Levinson provides numerous examples of the impact each has had on communication in recent history. He recalls that the Obama Girl became a sensation thanks to a YouTube video in 2007, and he describes the use of Twitter as a way that protesters shared information during the Iranian election of 2009 (and we have seen more recent examples in recent Middle Eastern upheavals).

He compares new formats to old media—the revolutionary impact of the telegraph for reporters who could file newspaper stories instantly as a precursor to the way blogging allows everyone to become instant reporters. He even finds an analogy between T-shirt slogans of the 1970s and 140-character messages on Twitter.

Levinson notes that distinguishing elements of "new new media" are both its immediacy and permanence. The introduction of the iPhone in 2007, he says, marked the beginning of a new

phase in the "new new media" revolution, permitting near-unlimited portability as consumers could easily connect to the Web from almost anywhere. And many of these new formats allow consumers to connect easily with one another as well, whether it is as Facebook friends or Twitter followers.

Because Levinson publishes this combination mini-history and guide via an old medium—a book—it lacks "new, new media" immediacy. He acknowledges that rapid changes in technology may leave out newer, more important formats than those he singled out for mention or full chapters. Of course, he's right. The book pre-dates or fails to index, for instance, the iPad or Tumblr, a simple blogging platform that reached 1.5 billion page views a month in 2010, according to TechCrunch, which collects and analyzes such data. Today, even Groupon, a deal-a-day discount company, might be added to the list because consumers with their buying decisions determine whether a deal is on.

Levinson's last three chapters veer from his earlier emphasis on particular formats. Instead, he discusses the dark side of new technologies, the 2008 election, and hardware. His "guns and pillows" analogy for new technology is excellent. Just as a pillow can be used for good (comfort) or evil (suffocation), he notes technology is neither inherently bad nor good.

The book is a great introduction to rapid changes in technology and communication, particularly for technophobes. It also provides a quick history for students who, having used sites like MySpace or Facebook for years, forget that those communication tools have not always existed. Even better, the book makes valuable connections between "new new media" and older forms of media.

SUE BURZYNSKI BULLARD University of Nebraska-Lincoln

http://www.aejmc.org/topics/archives/3178

Copyright © 2012 AEJMC