Preface

CRAFTING REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

Impetus for the Text: Looking Back and Moving Forward

With the advent of Web 2.0 technologies launched in the mid-90s, a century later isn’t it about time to reflect on how digital media has, is, and will be influencing daily life? In considering this possibility, we asked ourselves - how have digital media impacted education and advanced social and civic engagement in a global society? This became the guiding question that we as editors asked ourselves as we conceived this book and selected the authors of its 26 chapters who could best address the question. We believed that due to the rapidly evolving, nuanced, and often unpredictable nature of digital media, it was time to assess the impact of digital media on society from a variety of perspectives.

Our reasons for attempting to provide answers to our question were both professional and personal ones. On a personal level, we both have been amazed by and entrenched in the flurry of new digital media that has changed how we communicate with our friends, colleagues, and family; how we engage in social and political life; and even how we go about our recreational pursuits of reading and watching television or movies! It seems digital media has been seeping into every aspect of our lives from the clothing and accessories that we wear, like handbags with cell-phone pockets that accommodate “being wired” to the Apps on Smartphones that allow us to perform daily functions, like track our calories, find the cheapest gas price, evaluate the safety of products, check in for a flight, exercise, and stay constantly in touch with one another.

On a professional level, digital media has changed how we each teach our classes; how we conduct our research; and what topics we take up in our lines of inquiry. For example, Mellinee has investigated how the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) uses Twitter to educate the lay public about science (Lesley, 2014). Barbara has examined how middle-school and high-school teachers can use interactive sites in the virtual world of Second Life for teaching their disciplines (Guzzetti & Stockrocki, 2013). As members of the Baby Boomer generation, these are research topics that we never would have fathomed as we began our careers as literacy researchers and academicians in higher education. We are reminded that we both are “digital migrants” (Prensky, 2001) who did not grow up with digital media, but who as adults have embraced it and benefited from it in both our personal and professional lives.
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Content of the Chapters: Providing Directions and Perspectives

This attention to generation became an important consideration in designing this edited text and in selecting its authors. Today’s young people are commonly referred to as “millennials” and “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) having grown up with digital media. Youth spend nearly eight hours a day interacting with these media (Rideout, Foehr & Robbins, 2010). They are more likely to be “produsers” (Bruns, 2007) or those who are both users and producers of digital media than their parents or grandparents. Certainly, they will have the most influence on the future of new digital media as they will be designing the new technologies that we cannot even begin to imagine now.

Therefore, several chapters in this book focus on youth and digital media and the resulting implications for education and society - both now and in the future. For example, through case studies, Jill Denner and Jacob Martinez describe how children and youth make digital media to address inequities in their schools, communities, and societies; how they go about doing so; and the benefits to them and to society, as well as the barriers they face in their endeavors. Denner and Martinez argue media production is not neutral and suggest ways digital media can be used by youth as a platform for social justice. Richard Beach and Jill Castek examine how Apps and mobile devices are used by high school and college students for learning in formal and informal settings and the larger policy issues that impact mobile or m-learning. Beach and Castek note much more research is needed to address the usefulness of m-learning applications for various purposes and populations of users (e.g., individuals with special needs). Terry Cottrell focuses on digital multimedia for learning in higher education settings and the extension of this learning to broader society and work contexts. In his chapter, Cottrell questions whether digital media benefits educational outcomes. Dane Marco Di Cesare, Debra Harwood, and Jennifer Rowsell describe how children’s thinking through with digital worlds is impacting how they learn and approach the learning environment. They describe the changing nature of texts and how they are stored and accessed with the advent of new digital media. Di Cesare, Harwood and Rowsell also examine the ways children construct identities in digital spaces. Contributing to this theme, David O’Brien and Megan McDonald Vandeverenter discuss the nature of digital texts and the “Applification” of textbooks. They also examine the “affordances” of apps and consider the implications of the prevalence of apps in educational settings and broader society. Melanie Hundley and Teri Holbrook examine digital and multimedia texts and how these hybrid texts have changed the ways in which youth and adults read books and young adult novels in a more active and interactive way due to digital media. Hundley and Holbrook also posit that such texts point to a new kind of reader who visibly participates in the process of constructing meaning with a text thus blurring the lines between author and reader. Jessica Olin describes the impact of digital media on university and public libraries and how information is archived and obtained. Olin discusses issues surrounding the use of social media and open access in library settings and how such phenomenon changes the short and long term operations and planning of libraries.

Additional chapters focus on the creation, production, and consumption of new kinds of texts. Katina Zammit examines how wikis have fostered collective and cooperative writing and changed how texts are co-constructed in ways that support the 21st century skill of collaboration. Zammit also examines wikis from the standpoint of knowledge management. Alan Davis and Leslie Foley undertake a discussion of digital storytelling or telling personal narratives through digital images, sound, and words. They examine the ways digital media shapes, voice, power relations, ownership and dissemination in storytelling. Julie DeLello and Rachel McWhorter highlight how emerging visual technologies, including big data, infographics, digital badges, electronic portfolios (ePortfolios), visual social media, and augmented reality
are facilitating the development of technology-related skills required for academics and the workforce. Delelo and McWhorter examine the ways in which visual platforms promote engagement, subject-matter knowledge, and collaborative learning.

Providing a broader historical picture, Patricia Dickenson, Martin Hall, and Jennifer Courduff trace the evolution of Web 2.0 technologies. Their chapter examines the development of the Web and its various iterations while discussing how the emergence of participatory media influences personal and professional interactions, as well as education, governments, and businesses. Other chapter authors take up specific participatory digital media of Web 2.0, highlighting the new 21st century skills and abilities they foster. This section includes chapters on how digital media has changed the ways in which people live and communicate, including a chapter by Guy Merchant describing how individuals create alternative lives within virtual worlds. Merchant also examines the extent to which the virtual is embedded in everyday activities. Similarly, Gloria Jacobs examines texting and Instant Messaging and explores the implications of such synchronous forms of communication for marginalized individuals. Elizabeth Hayes Gee and Kelly Tran explain how creating and modding video games fosters 21st century design thinking. Gee and Tran offer an overview of new game making tools and describe ways game making blurs the lines between educational, professional, and fan-driven goals.

Brian Jones' chapter illustrates how art is created, shared, and critiqued in online spaces. Jones includes a discussion of the construct of “creativity” and the economically centric rhetoric and misconceptions latent in popular discourse surrounding the rise of a “creative economy.” Expanding on the notion of digital media for creativity, Kylie Peppler provides insights into digital design through e-textiles and wearable technologies. Her discussion extends to how avocations like crafting incorporate digital media to facilitate their production. Co-authors Elizabeth Baker, Arwa Alfayez, Christy Dalton, Renee Smith McInnish, Rebecca Scherdtfeger, and Mojtaba Khajeloo discuss digital communication through social media, such as YouTube, Twitter and Wikipedia and describe the indications that the democratization of communication is in peril. As part of this discussion, they examine the monopolization of communication and a “persistent spiral of silence.”

Other chapter authors focus on the germane issues that surround the take up of these digital media. Lynn Webb and Nicholas Temple describe gender equality and gender stereotyping in online spaces and call for liberation and increased equality between the sexes. In particular, they look at social media as sites for enacting gender equity. Deirdre Kelly and Chrissy Arnold describe instances of cyberbullying and how Internet safety is still a concern for many, suggesting important guidelines for interventions. Kelly and Arnold argue for rigorous definitions of cyberbulling and a greater understanding of online harassment. They also caution that youth experience online digital spaces as apprentice citizens and form views about democratic participation in these sites. Eliane Rubenstein Avila and Aurora Sartori draw attention to how nonmainstream populations access and engage with digital media and trouble notions of “the digital divide.” In particular, Rubenstein Avila and Sartori examine ways individuals perform racial identity online. In her chapter, Shelfai Virkar raises questions about the distributive impact of digital technologies and the social and political dynamics of digital technologies as tools for furthering global economic, social, and political development. Virkar asks, “Is the promise of ICT’s illusory?” and examines the gap between great optimism and reality of digital media in international contexts. Thomas Bean cites the need for a critical literacy approach to digital media, arguing that a global risk society overlaps with a need to develop an astute global citizenry able to collaborate and solve social problems, including war, climate change, racism, sexism, and identity theft. Further, Bean notes such transnationalism collapses geopolitical boundaries and necessitates the infusion of cosmopolitanism with globalization.
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Another set of authors address wider social economic and political issues surrounding digital media in a global society. Donna Alvermann, Crystal Beach, and George Boggs characterize digital media and discuss how these media disrupt traditional meaning making and identify the economic force of digital media content in contemporary society. Alvermann, Beach and Boggs also note the inequalities in economic opportunities in digital media “space.” George Boggs discusses how digital media affects the economy in a global society. He also discusses the significant changes to ways humans provide for their needs through digital media. Amir Manzoor describes social media for promoting grassroots political movements and social change on an international level. Manzoor’s chapter looks at the enormous potential of social networking tools to facilitate political mobilization. Judith Dunkerly and Helen Crompton identify the role of digital media in promoting global citizenship and human rights for women and girls. Through a lens of transnational feminist discourse, Dunkerly and Crompton examine advances in combatting illiteracy through mobile learning.

Focal Areas: Offering Insights into Digital Media, Issues, and Contextualization

These diverse topics that touch on digital media reflect three main areas of focus. The first focal area these authors explore is examining digital media that allow for content creation and interaction with Web 2.0 technologies. These chapters focus on such topics as creating video games; residing in virtual worlds; and creating, sharing, and reviewing art in online spaces. The second area authors explore encompasses the issues that surround these new digital media, particularly in terms of access and use. These chapters address how gender and diversity impact access to and use of digital media. The final area that these chapters reflect is how digital media have evolved and are situated within a larger society and a global economy. These chapters explore the economic significance of digital media in a global society and the political and social conditions that impact their adoption.

Structure and Format: Fostering Accessibility and Readability

Despite the diversity in this broad range of topics surrounding digital media that that reflect these focal areas, each chapter of this text follows the same format and structure. Following the Abstracts, each chapter begins with an introductory overview of the topic. The bulk of the chapter then follows with a succinct summary of the current and relevant research on the topic. Chapter authors also identify related issues raised by their reviews of the research on their topics. In doing so, these scholars identify gaps in the extant research and provide directions for future inquiries. Each chapter concludes with implications for education, policy, and civic and social engagement. Some of the chapters also include a list of additional readings to provide further information about topics presented in the chapters.

Several format features were designed to make these chapters and their structures readily accessible and comprehensible. Key terms or jargon are defined within the context in which they are used, as well as in a brief glossary following each chapter. Search terms are provided proceeding each chapter to make the chapter topics readily apparent to readers. Biographies of the chapter authors, including their institutional affiliations, are included to document their expertise and to provide readers with a glimpse into these scholars’ backgrounds and perspectives on their topics.
Intentions and Acknowledgements: Continuing the Dialogue

It is our hope that readers of this volume will continue to explore these topics – perhaps by contacting these authors - to carry on the discussion of the impact of digital media on a global society; to solicit advice or direction for future inquires; or to satisfy personal curiosities. These scholars who have contributed to this book deserve our acknowledgement and recognition for a thorough yet succinct presentation of pressing topics, issues, and perspectives on the impact of digital media on myriad aspects of daily life. We also wish to thank our editorial board members who contributed their expertise to help these scholars refine their chapters by checking for currency of citations and references, breadth and depth of content, and readability of their writing style and format.

We anticipate that the readers of this volume will have their own perspectives and expertise they bring with them to reading this text. We would welcome any comments and questions from readers. Our hope is to both advance and continue the dialogue we have begun here; we have included our email addresses below to facilitate that interaction. We hope you will find this volume useful as a resource and reference guide to exploring both new and familiar topics surrounding the impact of digital media on a changing and global society. In particular, we hope this volume helps to illuminate not only the present status of digital media in modern life (e.g., education, politics, civic engagement, social practices), but also compels readers to consider the possibilities digital media hold for mobilizing greater equity in the world. We hope this book serves you well in traversing our digital world.

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REFERENCES


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