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Abstract

Dengan edisi pertama buku ini yang terbit lebih dari satu dekade lalu dan edisi saat ini yang terbit baru sekitar setahun terakhir ini, masih banyak yang perlu dipahami dari teknologi dan media baru secara intelektual dan empiris. Buku dari Dr Eugenia Siapera, yang berjudul “Understanding New Media” edisi keenam mempermudah tugas para pembaca dengan memberikan informasi-informasi yang mudah dibaca dan komprehensif mengenai apa yang kita perlu ketahui dari konsep ‘media baru’, jenis-jenisnya dan hubungan-hubungannya dengan elemen-elemen sosial dan non-sosial dari masyarakat. Keberagaman, hegemoni, produksi, konsumsi, teori-teori dan ekonomi politik adalah beberapa tema kunci yang Dr Siapera kaji secara kritis dalam bukunya. Karena pentingnya pembahasan isu ekonomi politik, ia mendedikasikan satu bab penuh (Bab 2) untuk ekonomi politik media baru. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis wacana kritis, kami mengulas Bab 1, 2 dan 5 saja karena kepentingan kritis dari analisis yang disediakan dalam bab-bab tersebut terhadap sebagian dari topik-topik kajian dan penelitian media yang paling menarik, seperti isu-isu terkait konsep media baru, pengaruh ekonomi politik dalam penyebaran dan konsumsi konten media, termasuk juga penggunaan dan efek negatif dari media baru di masyarakat, khususnya terhadap pengguna muda.

With the first edition of this work conceived well over a decade ago and the present edition published just about a year ago, there is still much to understand about technologies and new media intellectually and empirically. Dr Eugenia Siapera’s work “Understanding New Media”, 6th Edition eases the task for readers by providing comprehensive and readable information about much that we need to know on the concept ‘new media’, its variants and their relationships with the social and other non-social elements of society. Diversity, hegemony, production, consumption, theories and political economy are some of the key themes Dr. Siapera examined critically in her work. Because of the importance she attaches to the issue of political economy, the author dedicated a whole chapter (Chapter 2) to political economy of new media. Using critical discourse analysis approach, we reviewed chapters 1, 2 and 5 only. This is because of the critical importance of the analysis provided in these chapters on some of the most intriguing topics in media studies and research such as issues surrounding the concept of new media, the influence of political economy on media content dissemination and consumption as well as the negative uses and effects of new media in society, especially on young users.

Kata kunci/Keywords:

Penyalahgunaan media baru; teori komunikasi; internet; media baru; komunikasi massa; media massa; ekonomi politik komunikasi; platform media sosial.

Abuses of new media; communication theories; internet; new media; mass communication; mass media, political economy of communication; social media platforms.

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Introduction

“Understanding New Media”, 2nd Edition was published in 2018 by the prestigious publishing giant, Sage. This book follows the author’s 1st Edition, which was published seven years earlier, in 2011. The work was conceived in 2008, when the terms ‘new media’ or ‘new technologies’ have not yet become part of our vocabularies. However, 11 years afterwards, the so-called new media and new technologies have become part and parcel of the lifestyle of many people, have become the subject of debate whether to adopt or not within many organizations and have, importantly, become the fulcrum of power and control in media economics and politics around the world. Dr. Eugenia Siapera, who is a professor
at the London School of Economics and Political Science’s Media and Communication department is the author of this book.

Dr. Eugenia Siapera’s choice of this title “Understanding New Media” for her work is, certainly, apt but is thought-provoking as well. Thought-provoking in the sense that a call to understand something that has already become part and parcel of your everyday lifestyle for several years may sound a bit ‘challenging’. Because, in everyday parlance the term ‘new media’ is understood as internet-enabled media and applications such as social media, multimedia, websites and even e-games, and these are our everyday ‘pets’. Coincidentally, however, challenge is what the author intends to provoke, especially among students. Here is what she says:

There are a lot of new media and technology gurus and futurologists out there, but what this book aspires to is something different: not to predict, but to read, analyse and understand current trends, based on empirical research and social scientific theories, and, at the same time, to offer students an analytical template through which to make sense of the present and future developments in new and social media.

Furthermore, Dr. Siapera wants to throw that challenge to readers and achieve those goals through providing “a means by which to decipher the complex relationships between technologies, media and social fields.” As she puts it, she has made lofty attempts to examine and analyse distinctively, the links and differences between those three major themes of technologies, media and social fields. As a matter of fact, the author has made us understand that ‘technologies’ and ‘media’ are two different distinct systems even though they may share common traits and characteristics. I think, I must not omit to mention too that without Dr. Siapera’s telling the world that technologies and media are distinct, a large cross section of technology users (or, audiences) would simply pass technologies for ‘new media’, and perhaps, nothing else.

With this book, the reader is provided with a wealth of original information and knowledge about the ‘dynamism’ of the dynamics of media in virtually all its ramifications, with a focus on the progressive innovations and novelties of the media as a rapidly transforming system of global ‘info-connectivity’. The examination and explanation by the author of the complex relationships between the trio of technologies, media and social fields paint a picture of the comprehensiveness of the content of this work regarding new media and the social settings in which they co-exist and co-interact with the social (human) aspect of the global society. Perhaps, we may suggest that Dr. Siapera should have added the concept of ‘society’ to the title of her work – “Understanding New Media ‘and Society’” – thus completing the triangular paths of the new media system discourse.

Furthermore, with the first edition of this work conceived well over a decade ago and the present edition published just about a year ago, there is still much to understand about technologies and new media intellectually and empirically. Dr E. Siapera’s work “Understanding New Media”, 6th Edition eases the task for readers by providing comprehensive and readable information about much that we need to know on the concept ‘new media’, its variants and their relationships with the social and other non-social elements of society. Diversity, hegemony, production, consumption, theories and political economy are some of the key themes Dr. Siapera examined critically in her work. Because of the importance she attaches to the issue of political economy, the author dedicated a whole chapter (Chapter 2) to political economy of new media.

This review essay focuses on reviewing chapters 1, 2 and 5 only. Chapter 1 examines the topic of the book – the main theme of Siapera’s work, aimed at providing further understanding about new media and its dynamics in society. Chapter 2 examines one of the critical themes in media studies and research – the political economy of communication, specifically, the political economy of new media. While Chapter 5, which is the last chapter in this review essay, focuses on providing understanding about the links between new media and audiences, or more appropriately, users. Siapera went further to say, The choice of this term is therefore more appropriate for a book that seeks to outline the dynamic introduced by these kinds of media and the wider consequences they may have for everyday life. This book is therefore concerned with providing a sketch of some of these consequences on discrete fields of life.

Chapter 1: Understanding New Media

In this chapter, the author examines the above-mentioned proposition in some detail. She looks at the theories, suppositions and arguments regarding this complex relationship. The main objective of this chapter, according to the author, is to provide an understanding about how technology has been viewed by different theorists and how these understandings are fed into an understanding of the relationship between technologies, media, societies and individuals.

Furthermore, in this chapter, the author focuses on two key themes, namely ‘technology and society’ and ‘new media’. Dr Siapera extensively examines different perspectives that highlights the aims and objectives of the book clearly. Interestingly, this chapter provides a strong basis to the understanding of theoretical perspectives governing media and society research and discourse. Dr. Siapera owes much of her perspectives and arguments to the works and school of thoughts of McLuhan, Kittler and Castells, who she says represent
3. Chapter 2: Political Economy of New Media

In this chapter, Dr. E. Siapera focuses on a crucial theme – that of the economy. She examines the ways in which new technologies and media are intrinsically connected with the economy and with shifts in patterns of labour and employment. Furthermore, this chapter looks at the political economy of the new media. Political economy is a critical classic theory that is employed to analyze social phenomena. A framework which provides theoretical underpinning to analyze new media as a social phenomenon has been examined and discussed in this chapter. Arguing from the perspective of Castells (1996, 1997, 1998), the author holds that “the network society constitutes a new formation in which network organizations play a vital role in changing economy and political system.” This, according the author, raises a concern about the association between the trio of new media, economy and society.

Taking from Kettler’s perspective, Siapera stresses that “ informational capitalism” is the theoretical lens through which to look at issues surrounding new media content production, distribution and consumption as typical processes in political economy of communication as well as the changing landscape of labour, e.g., labour mobility, immaterial labour, or virtual labour, all of which are affected by developments in new media and technologies. The author further explains how new media and technologies continue to transform capitalism, saying that to the extent that it is capitalist, it revolves around the same quest of profit and entails the same dynamic between labour and capital as with the previous paradigm, that of industrial capitalism. But to the extent that it is characterized as informational, this kind of capitalism is substantially different from the industrial one, and we must study its differences in order to understand how the economy and society are changing.

Siapera further stresses that globalization is a pivotal feature of the ‘informational capitalism’ that paves the way for new form of economy, which relies on new media and technologies. According to her, content production has become “informationalized”, a phenomenon that has provided salience to production of information and knowledge, which has gradually given rise to a new form of labour that is “virtual and immaterial”, or immaterial labour. Labour force now prefer to work in virtual or networked environment as the changing landscape of labour, e.g., labour mobility, immaterial labour, or virtual labour. Labour force now prefer to work in virtual or networked environment that encourages autonomy of a worker rather than work in physically established organizations. The author places new at the centre of societal change, which performs critical functions.

The advent of the so-called ‘informational’ labour has so far given rise to the emergence and growth global information technology giants and new media corporations like Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Apple Inc., and recently, Huawei that monoplistically deal in hardware and software productions and facilitate easy informational
transaction across the global networked society. This situation prompts a question about ownership and power relation. The new technologies make it easier for convergence to take place at different levels that lead to merger and absorption of initially separate corporate organizations. However, the chapter interestingly captures the economic fortune of these leading new media corporations that facilitate information production and consumption across the globe, indicating relative profit and loss of each organization.

Also, critically examined in this chapter is the issue of how the emerging network organizations or the new media are struggling to find a business model that will earn them profit since the environment allows free flow of content and creation that cannot be monopolized easily. Unlike the mainstream media that has control over their content which makes it easier for them to commodity the contents, new media is lost in this regard. Again, users are becoming more active in the network society by being consumers and producers of content. The new media simply provides platform for the users and perhaps little content, while the users take the lead in both content production and even distribution through sharing and other means. In a nutshell, the author has been able to provide a clear understanding of the dynamics of new media and the burning issues of content production, distribution and consumption processes, not omitting the consumers themselves. These are some of the strengths of this chapter.

4. Chapter 5: New Media Uses and Abuses

Everything has good and bad sides, says the adage. So are new media. Dr. Siapera attempts to provide further understanding about the wholesome and unwholesome uses people put new media and technologies to context wise.

From the wholesome uses of new media, Dr. Siapera highlights theoretical frameworks used to discuss media diffusion, adoption and use and examined theories that are considered influential to new media use such as Rogers’ (2003) Diffusion of Innovation (DoI) model, which focuses on explaining and predicting user decision to use a new technology and Katz, Blumber and Gurevitch’s (1973) Uses and Gratification (U&G) model, which seeks to explain what people do with the media. The author’s unraveling theoretical underpinnings toward new media use by individuals and groups lends credence to the momentum virtual labour and virtual community are gaining with the rapid innovations in new technologies. The concept of diffusion of technology is defined and analyzed in the early work of scholars such as Katz, Levin and Hamilton (1963). As the scholars noted, diffusion of technology occurs in seven stages: (i) acceptance, (ii) over time, (iii) of some specific item, e.g., an idea or practice, (iv) by individuals, groups or other units, linked (v) to specific channels of communication, (vi) to a social structure, and (vii) and to a given system of values and culture.

The author went further to examine discourse related to Theory of Domestication of New Media (TDNM), which provides analytical underpinning to explain and predict the value and meaning people attach to technology. TDNM has three dimensions namely, (i) the meaning and value attached to media technologies are created and recreated in the course of integrating and adapting media into everyday life; (ii) users and their everyday lives are themselves changed in this process; and (iii) users’ adaptations feed back into the design of the next technologies and media. Importantly, the domestication process has been shown to involve four key phases: (i) appropriation, (ii) objectification, (iii) incorporation and (iv) conversion.

New media “abuses”, as the author describes the behaviour, involves the disuse and misuse of new media by individuals, groups or other entities. Negative uses deliberately intended such as cyberbullying are a ‘disuse’ while unintended negative uses, or positive uses yielding negative outcomes, e.g., addiction are a ‘misuse. Dr. Siapera extensively examined such issues related to the ‘ab-use’, or improper use of new media as internet addiction, cyber bullying, trolling, cyber-balkanization, loss of social capital, techno-elitism and even the dark web syndrome (Hankey, Marrison & Naik, 2018).

These new media abuses are gradually raising concerns about the security of online content and transactions as well as the safety of online users because they are directly affecting users’ attitudes and behaviours. As the author noted, though internet addiction remains a debatable issue whether internet is actually addictive or not, the phenomenon is gaining tremendous research and analytical attention especially in Asia because of its prevalence in recent times despite yielding mixed, inconclusive findings. In addition to internet addiction, cyberbullying is also another growing abuse of new media, mostly affecting youngsters that use online platforms. Hinduja and Patchin (2015) define cyberbullying as the willful and repeated harm inflicted through computers, cell phones and other electronic devices. Writing on the ‘newness’ of cyberbullying phenomenon, Tokunaga (2010) noted that no articles had ever been published regarding cyberbullying in any year prior to 2004. Although much like the traditional bullying, what differentiates it from the traditional form of bullying is the new media interface. Siapera also discusses trolling as a form of new media abuse. As she notes, citing Coles and West (2016, p.233) who define trolling as “any specific type of malicious behavior intended to aggravate, annoy or otherwise disrupt online interactions and communication.” Because of the anonymity offered by the vast online cyber space, and because of the growing number of skilled users, especially young people, the abuse of new media is bound to continue and become
even more sophisticated with time.

By and large, these chapters have provided further understanding about the deeper relationships between new media and society and what prospects lie in the future for the new technologies and their users. The chapters can be useful to students, scholars and researchers wanting to gain deeper understanding of and explore the complex links between new media technologies and wider society.

Bibliography
