

# *New Media: A Critical Introduction*

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*Martin Lister, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant, and Kieran Kelly (2010). New Media: A Critical Introduction. London: Routledge Publication, pp. 446, Rs. 2350, ISBN 9780415431613.*

**Introduction of the Authors:** Martin Lister is a Professor of Visual Culture in the Department of Culture, Media and Drama, at UWE, Bristol. He has written widely on photography, visual culture, and new media technologies and is a curator and media producer.

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Kieran Kelly is a Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies at UWE where he teaches media theory. He started working in public sector computing over 20 years ago.

**An overview of the book:** The media world has passed through many developments in the past years and the book titled "New Media: A Critical Introduction" addresses all the key issues which have arisen due to emergence of new media technologies. Five colleagues came together to present the reader an excellent book boosted with historical developments, case studies, photographs and diagrams.

The book targets especially students with some background in media studies, by giving them conceptual frameworks for thinking about the development of the new media in the last two decades. The book talks about the methods and social practices of communication, representation and expression, which have developed using the digital, multimedia, networked computer. The book emphasises on the process of computerisation or digitisation that has impacted other media in twentieth century: the whole gamut- from books to movies, from telephones to televisions.

**Review:** In spite of dedicating each chapter to a separate new media form, the book is divided into five major sections discussing different set of critical issues, alongside more detailed discussion of particular media form as required.

The book covers the media, communication and new technological developments in depth by using numerous case studies, arguments and using stand-alone boxes with additional explanations. Writing about new media is a challenging task, because constant technological and media changes make some media old and out dated, which could have been new at the time of writing. But the authors rightfully have addressed the issue and have focussed not only on cyber-culture, but have laid down many historical and contemporary facts that have a bearing on the present situation.

The first part of the book covers the string of reasons for the rise of New media, its characteristics, and historical background. The panorama includes: digital, interactive, hyper-textual, networked, virtual, and simulated media and are discussed in great detail. The authors have clearly differentiated analogue and digital media in this section and have named the audience of new media as 'user' rather than 'viewer' as they can actively intervene while viewing or reading.

An important concept in the cultural study of media technology-'technological imaginary' is introduced. This explains the way media projects dissatisfaction with social reality, and the desire for a better society, through technologies as a complete and effective of delivery is possible.

The first section recognises the previous work by Marshall McLuhan- who said that technology is an extension of man. He felt media and technology are not separate. All new media remediate or adapt previously existing media, for example World Wide Web remediates magazine, computer games remediates cinema etc.

The second part of the book discusses how new visual media and imaging technologies are bringing about contemporary changes in visual culture. The authors trace the history of virtual reality, immersive media and digital cinema and explain that in new media or digital culture, the virtual is equivalent to the simulated one. Virtual realities and virtual environments are produced by simulation technologies, principally: computer graphics software and telecommunication networks.

The authors state that main issues in theories of photography, film and cinema are their realism and nature of visual representation. In the world of new media simulations, computer generated animations; special effects and digital camera are used for showing the presence of virtual reality. In this section numerous examples of movies, like *Cyberworld 3D*, *Toy Story*, *Antz*, *Sin City* etc. are quoted thus making it interesting and easy to relate.

The next section of the book demonstrates the need to understand the relationships between human creativity, technological potential and possibilities offered by the market. The authors define internet as the collection of networks that link computers and servers together. This rapid spread of networked communication through PCs and servers has attracted enormous quantities of popular excitement, critical attention and commercial interest. In reality, growth of internet since the invention of World Wide Web is a remarkable cultural achievement. The internet has led to Computer Mediated Communication (CMC).

As per the remediation effect, the existing media, e.g. TV, film or photography find new distribution channels online and change their cultural form. Even hybrid forms of new media emerge by interaction between existing media and the new distribution technologies of the net. The web allows people to express themselves by putting up their own sites on social networks, blogs, YouTube posts, etc.

The authors more specifically examine the way in which network based businesses have been subject to the boom and bust cycle, emphasising on dotcom crash of 2000-2002. Examples of music industry, which are affected

by network practices and technologies and the subsequent gaining of importance of intellectual property rights, are provided. The tension between economic determination and media culture is explained by 'Long Tail' theory of economics. The model helps to unlock new possibilities for users and producers and leads to new business practices of viral marketing, community management and web advertising.

The fourth section is more interesting and talks about the presence of new media in everyday life- our personal spaces, family and home. This section describes the cultural phenomena that occur when children and adults experience new media like videogames and mobile phones. Many concepts have been drawn from new media studies, such as science and technology, game and cyber-cultural studies. They put forth explanations that bring changes in human life due to the presence of new media.

The fifth and the last section of the book explains the part played by technology's sheer physical form in shaping history and culture. There are apparently three periods in the history of technology: mechanical, steam and cybernetics. All of them affect the culture around them. The concept of 'Cyber-culture' is discussed in detail in this section. The authors argue that nature, culture and technologies cannot be separated from each other. Focusing on the concept of causality the section concludes with the kind of realism necessary to understand technology in culture.

The book talks about many critical issues related to culture, technology and media; but the authors have presented them in a lighter tone by citing examples from movies, video games, paintings etc. As the book's main targets are students, the authors have tried very hard and are also reasonably successful in their attempt at keeping a light tone, through case studies and lucid representation of thoughts.

However, the book has given more attention to cultural studies than other areas like sociology, philosophy etc. This shows the authors' areas of interest and leaves space for further improvement. All aspects of new media are

not given equal attention and a few are emphasised more throughout the book.

A student interested in reading a particular new media may not find the book helpful; had they discussed all the new media in any one of the five sections, in detail, that would have solved the problem. But overall the

book is a must read for people interested in the area of media studies. This is especially helpful for teachers and students who want to know about new media and its related fields. The book gives excellent perspective on the theory and practice of new media and its relation to nature, culture and our everyday life.

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