

BOOK REVIEW

Understanding the Business of Global Media in the Digital Age, by Micky Lee and Dal Yong Jin. New York, NY: Routledge, 2018. \$41.56 U.S., paper. ISBN: 978-1-138-688896-4. Pages: 1-269.

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The global media industry and its workers have face huge changes since the early 2000s, often with negative impacts resulting in declining working conditions, concentration of ownership and commodification of content. The book *Understanding the Business of Global Media in the Digital Age* try to face those challenge by developing new approaches to think about the transformation of the media business in the 21st century.

The authors Micky Lee and Dal Yong Yin, propose three aspects in their book to meet this task: (1) provide example from different country, especially non-western, to see how the media business can be influence by multiple factor such as informal economy or state intervention, (2) introduce three theoretical framework to study the media, which are Media Economics, Critical Political Economy, and Production Studies, and (3) to understand the media business through six different lenses: Economies, Politics, Technologies, Civil Societies, Cultures and Labor.

The first thing to say about this book is that it is written for undergraduate students. This is a weak point, but also an advantage. Weak point because some theoretical framework are introduced too easily or even naively, especially the political economy of communication. But it is also an advantage because the authors really take the readers by the hand and give concrete examples to start a case study, for example how to get the financial results of a big corporation like Google or Bloomberg.

After a short introduction, the second chapter open up with a brief history of business of media studies. According to the authors, researchers have only begun to study the media business systematically since the 1980s. This position is of course a shortcut, but Winseck (2016) has already done a review of the work prior to this period. Three factors have reignited the interest for this subject since the 2000s: the rise of neoliberalism, globalization and media convergence, all related factors. For example: neoliberalism and globalization encourages the development of transnational corporation that uses their power to foster convergence of content across multiple platforms.

Chapter Three is devoted to theoretical approaches. The first approach is Media Economics, which is essentially the application of neoclassical economics to the study of “objective models” such as media markets or consumers behaviors. The second, more critical, framework is the political economy of communication which examine “the role of power in the production, distribution and exchange of mediated communication” (p. 25). The idea is to examine the role and function of the media in the different forms of capitalism (fordism, finance). The third framework, drawn from Cultural Studies, is Production Studies, which is “the study of the people and processes that cause media to take the forms they do” (p. 43). This theory comes out of abstraction and tries to understand the fluid meanings of media production. The authors offer an interesting comparison

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of the three frameworks, which, for example, from the point of view of methodology, range from objective methods (Media economics) to critical realism (political economy), or interpretative methods like ethnography (Production studies). The following chapters deal with the six lenses to rethink the business of global media. The authors systematically use the three theories to contextualize their subjects. A relevant case study also closes each of these chapters.

The first lens is economies. Economy is not considered a single entity but rather “a fluid concept that encompasses both an objective reality and a subjective perception, both a state and a process, both a macro and a micro concept” (p. 65). This conception of the economy is very useful to think about the media that currently rely on both the global corporations listed on the stock exchange, but also on many informal economy like hacking or free labor of social network users.

The second lens is politics. The role of the state in the media business model varies from country to country. One might think that neoliberalism, privatization of the public sector, and deregulation translates into a withdrawal of the state from the media world. This is true in the United States, but not necessarily in other countries like Japan or South Korea where state agencies are responsible for promoting creative industries as the « Korean Wave » (p. 121).

The next lens is technology. Information and communication technologies (ICT) can be disruptive force in the media landscape, but also change agent and power consolidator. Media companies can for example take advantage of digitization by offering content on multiple platforms. Digital technology has also lowered the entry cost to the content. But the rise of the TIC can also lead to commodification of information and labor because it blurred the edges between work and free time.

While the civil societies lens develops on the economic dynamics of public, community and activist media, as well as the usefulness of crowdfunding, the labor lens explain how labor is more global and transnational than ever, but also more objectified, exploited and alienated by factors such as the flexible, affective or free labor.

Finally, culture lens makes it possible to analyze “how media workers construct their personal and professional identities, which in term shape media practices” (p. 192). Audience are also more active than ever in the digital age. We can talk of “participatory culture” to illustrate the creativity and the implication of the new media consumer (p. 203). But this creativity is not only positive while the audience is more commodified than ever with targeted advertising and the sale of personal data.

This book is an excellent introduction for undergraduate students seeking to learn both critical media theories and different research methods. However, the attention given to the framework of media economics is, I believe, exaggerated considering that this theory is very orthodox, positivist and supports (and even cheers) capitalism (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009). I find it odd that so much space is given to this very liberal and orthodox theory that is not even taught in many faculties of communication. The cultural industries approach is more popular (and I believe more useful) in the french-speaking world (Miège, 1989). The authors could also have looked more towards the sociology of journalism or economic sociology to think about the relationship between the economy and the media in the digital age (Lee, 2014).

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