Digital Dilemmas: Power, Resistance, and the Internet, by M. I. Franklin; The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age, by James G. Webster; Forging Trust Communities: How Technology Changes Politics, by Irene S. Wu

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Book Reviews

Digital Dilemmas: Power, Resistance, and the Internet, by M. I. Franklin. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013. 271 pp. $29.95 paperback.

The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age, by James G. Webster. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016. 268 pp. $29.95 hardcover.

Forging Trust Communities: How Technology Changes Politics, by Irene S. Wu. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. 176 pp. $21.95 paperback.

Reviewed by DANIEL KREISS

The study of the widespread adoption of the Internet and the medium's implications for political communication is now entering its third decade. The medium has undergone remarkable changes during that time period. Brian McNair (2011) noted that when his *Introduction to Political Communication* was first published in 1995, the Internet did not play a significant role in political processes. By the book's fifth edition in 2011, it was challenging to find an aspect of political communication that was not impacted in some way by the Internet and digital communications technologies more broadly. Scholarship advanced alongside the extraordinary growth of the medium, as theorists and researchers sought to understand the changing communications environment and its impact on the production of political communication, the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of citizens, and the relationships among political elites, government officials, journalists, civil society organizations, movements, and citizens.

James Webster's *The Marketplace of Attention*, M. I. Franklin's *Digital Dilemmas*, and Irene Wu's *Forging Trust Communities* all offer nice summations of and contributions to various strains of scholarship that have taken place over the past two decades. These works, to greater and lesser extents, move us forward at the start of a third decade of the Internet and digital technologies more broadly being part of the background context of our political and social lives (see Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2013). Webster's *The Marketplace of Attention* is a major work that makes a significant contribution to the political communication literature, and the field of communication more generally. Webster develops a robust analytical model regarding the relationships among media producers, audiences, and the contemporary media environment. Franklin's *Digital Dilemmas* provides a sweeping legal, technological, social, and cultural analysis of

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power and resistance in the digital age. *Forging Trust Communities* seeks to get at the underlying dynamics of social media, information sharing, and collective action. I discuss each in turn.

The Marketplace of Attention is a significant contribution to the field, providing a novel theoretical reformulation of the relationship between audiences and media premised on the interplay between agency and structure. Webster's theoretical approach is primarily drawn from sociologist Anthony Giddens's structuration theory. Webster argues that audience formation is best explained by considering how individuals are born into a structured world, and then subsequently use that world to achieve their own ends. In the process of doing so, individuals both reproduce and change the world, in essence providing for both the durability and evolution of the world they inhabit. For how this plays out in the context of media, Webster argues that users encounter a structured media world of companies, websites, and content more broadly. These media structures change as users choose among their elements, which in turn shapes users' subsequent actions. All this means that to understand how audience attention takes shape requires moving from individual psychological factors and toward accounting for collective behavior over time and how producers imagine and adapt to audiences.

Webster argues that we should not think about audiences as mere collections of internally driven individuals. Theories that are premised upon this view, including the reigning paradigms of rational choice, uses and gratifications, and selective exposure, all fail to adequately account for preferences or the ways people are boundedly rational, rely on repertoires, heuristics, and social ties to manage media choice, and consume media within the contexts of daily life that make certain media available. In sum, Webster offers a powerful and profound theoretical and methodological critique of much media psychology research and the effects tradition more broadly in showing how these perspectives provide little insight onto the basic problem of how we explain attention.

To take one example, Webster notes that media preferences are, in significant part, endogenous. As Webster puts it, the idea that people have preexisting media preferences that they select for on the basis of their moods or predispositions, or search for in the context of their desired gratifications is quite limited, to put it lightly. Webster convincingly demonstrates that preferences are, in no small part, endogenous in being produced by the media system itself. People do not just pick media as if they were fruit on a tree depending on intrinsic psychological needs, Webster argues; media structures endogenously condition preferences over time. In Webster's model, there is reciprocal influence between preferences and media. Media condition *future* preferences through producers' attempts to create audiences using things such as online advertising, even as audiences shape *future* content as producers respond to their attention.

Along the way, Webster advances a number of important empirical claims. Of particular interest to political communication scholars, Webster offers a powerful critique of theories of polarization and fragmentation in convincingly demonstrating that media outlets have profoundly overlapping audiences. There are numerous reasons for this, all related in some way to the elements that Webster adds to models of media structures and audience attention, including the ways that distribution networks and Internet architecture continually reward media companies that have large audiences, quality creates audience convergence, and media have a highly social dimension (people consume what they can talk about). Webster also explains and reveals the endurance of local news, the surprising lack of polarization among political news audiences, and the persistence of taste communities that cross-cut political content. All of this relates to the fact that there are media, social, and everyday life structures that work against the ideologically driven polarization

that experimentalists have often found in the lab. Indeed, Webster argues that existing structures mean that we might be "headed for a massively *overlapping* culture" (p. 119).

Methodologically speaking, an underlying point of Webster's theoretical discussion is that experimental approaches that bracket lived time and social and media contexts miss a significant part of the story of audience formation. To put it another way, an experimental study might find exogenous preferences and selective exposure determining media choice in the lab, but this says very little about how audiences will behave in the real world. Webster makes the point, for instance, that media use is embedded in everyday life, and structured by time and attention. It is all well and good to talk about preexisting preferences and moods, but we may not actually have time, space, and availability to act upon them.

As is clear, Webster's argument has a number of significant analytical and methodological implications. I cannot address them all here, but here are a couple of final points. First, the realm of production studies, so wonderfully conceptualized and researched by scholars such as Joe Turow (2007), deserves new attention in political communication research. How the producers of political communication come to understand and conceptualize audiences and how this affects the content they produce over time, and in turn shapes the *future preferences* of audiences, should be part of the object of analysis of political communication scholars alongside the work that goes on in people's heads.

Webster also points us to a way through a persistent problem in the field: When a scholarly object of interest is media, researchers tend to see all social problems through that lens. Webster usefully reminds us that the world is not limited to media structures. Social structures grounded in language, religion, class, and taste similarly condition media preference, in addition to the patterns of everyday life shaped by the economy and industry. This might help us explain why there are similar developments in media structures underway in other countries, with very different social outcomes. I also found it interesting that Webster's arguments regarding structuration theory and media audience formation link to recent scholarship in other domains, such as Green, Palmquist, and Schickler's (2004) work on political parties. These scholars argue that political parties produce partisans; parties teach people what right-thinking Democrats and Republicans believe. In similar ways as media use, political preferences are not innate or freely chosen, nor are parties simply the aggregates of individual choices. Individual political attitudes and beliefs are the outcomes of the political communication and histories of parties.

All of these things have profound implications for political communication. As Webster implies through his discussion, we need methodological approaches that are reciprocal with respect to analyzing the relationship between audiences and media structures and historical with respect to how preferences and genres change over time. We also need methods that are expansive in terms of taking into account the many different technological ways of constituting audiences, from recommendation systems and search engines to online advertising, and embedded in the real-world social, technological, and life contexts that shape how attention is constituted. And, Webster's framework will likely endure in the face of ongoing media change. My only criticism of the book is that while there is some discussion of social media, the lack of sustained engagement with that literature here is an oversight, particularly for a book that was released in 2014. That said, the concentration of the industry and audiences around the services Facebook and Google provide fits Webster's model of overlapping audiences perfectly. This is a relatively minor criticism, though. This is a refreshingly ambitious book about the totality of media experience that offers a compelling theoretical model and extensive empirical evidence. *The Marketplace of Attention* deserves widespread attention.

While Webster makes his case with mostly macro-level audience data such as traffic patterns and survey evidence, M. I. Franklin's *Digital Dilemmas* presents a series of case studies drawn primarily from fieldwork and interpretations of historical data. *Digital Dilemmas* provides an interesting and provocative account of the ways that power and resistance change in the context of digital media, grounded in the traditions of cultural and social theory. A trio of richly argued and empirically grounded case studies makes up the core of the book. The first addresses international legal battles over intellectual property and competition. The second takes a fieldwork approach to homelessness and Internet use, while the third chapter focuses on international online mobilization in the wake of the United Nation's (UN) Internet Governance Forum.

The thread that ties these disparate cases together is an emphasis on practice. Franklin argues that much of the literature to date in fields ranging from communication and media studies to Internet governance makes claims that are variously technology or media-focused. Instead, Franklin argues that scholars should think about historically embedded practices as they take shape in space, time, and economic contexts, and through interactions with technology. The emphasis on practice enables Franklin to go beyond the meta-theoretical accounts of critical theory and show how people navigate their everyday lives within the ambiguous and heterogeneous contexts where economic power and technological and regulatory structures intersect to shape the forms of resistance that are possible. Although their empirical orientations are very different, both Webster and Franklin converge on a model where powerful forces ranging from technological design to economic incentives forge structures that are at once durable and malleable over time. However, for Franklin, it is less the forms that audiences collectively take than the possibilities for collective action that animate the core concerns of the book.

Franklin's case studies illustrate how resistance can take shape within changing media and technological environments. The first case is a historical reconstruction of *U.S. v. the Microsoft Corporation* that is premised on an analysis of not only legal arguments, but the work of standards, the marked resistance to the firm by the Department of Justice under President Bill Clinton as well as by computer and software companies, and the development of open-source operating systems that challenged Microsoft's proprietary model. The second case takes a radically local view of the ways that homeless people make tactical use of the web through creating support networks, finding resources, and using the Internet to gain visibility and the right of self-representation. These tactical uses of media sit alongside the ways that digital technologies afford public and other entities with possibilities for disciplining and surveilling these individuals. Finally, Franklin details the online practices that activists use in battles over Internet governance, showing how they have a number of new tools at their disposal to contest dominant framings, hash out working consensus, and collaborate on oppositional activities.

Moving across radically different cases of resistance practices can make for challenging reading. While the cases hang together as coherent wholes, the book is also packed with theoretical accounts and both chronicles and contributes to various scholarly debates, so much so that the thread of the argument can become lost at times, particularly in the introduction and theory chapters. Despite this, the scope of the work is impressive, and the bibliography alone is worth its considerable heft in terms of mapping the current state of the field. In the end, the book gives us a nice theoretical grounding for taking human practices and experiences seriously in the context of larger debates over contemporary social and technological structures. As such, it makes a valuable call to enrich theoretical debates with a rigorous empiricism.

While Webster's and Franklin's books are built on careful attention to practice and the broad interplay of structure and agency, Irene Wu's *Forging Trust Communities* is largely an extended argument about the subtitle of the book: "How technology changes politics." The key claim of the book is that technology changes politics through the mechanism of trust; as people use digital technologies they build trust and a shared identity which enables them to cooperate and transforms loosely tied networks into communities. In Wu's formulation, these trust communities can exist at both the micro (neighborhood residents taking action) and macro (the nation) levels. Trust communities are made up of people who share a common identity and interests and are connected through communications technologies. The book proceeds through a series of sketches of case studies that explore different workings of trust communities, from tsunami relief and the ways that social movements challenge government institutions to state efforts to foster national identity.

While the scale of the account is ambitious, in the end the concept of "trust communities" has to perform an incredible amount of work. For example, the concept has to be stretched considerably to meaningfully encompass the mechanisms underlying "a group of volunteers around the world sharing information over the internet, a nation of people following the evening television newscast, or a bunch of neighbors keeping up to date with a community newspaper" (p. 119)—which are all considered "trust communities." As is clear, the memberships of trust communities are necessarily diverse. Wu, for instance, includes governments, reporters, and police as a part of trust communities provided they share a cause and purpose (including something as loose as seeking to understand current events). And this is where the analytic utility of the idea of trust communities can become problematic. What happens when many fundamentally opposed people share a simple desire to understand current events in a particular geographic community? Calling that an "evening news trust community" likely would paper over the many different, competing, or opposed aims that are in play among a viewing audience. Would we really want to consider the police in Ferguson and the protesters taking to the streets to protest patterns of segregation, intimidation, degradation, and brutality all a part of the same "trust community" if they watch the same nightly news broadcast and are engaged in the common project of interpreting the world? It would seem that people are just as likely to convene around communications media in order to fundamentally clash over identity, values, and policies, in the moment or in the future, and I am not sure what analytical value there is in conceptualizing this as being about "trust" or these relations as being those of a "community."

At the same time, I was left thinking about the importance of trust's converse: distrust. While trust is undoubtedly central to contemporary life, distrust (perhaps of other trust communities) might serve as an equally powerful force for shared identity and collective action. And, it is distrust that might create our most enduring and important institutions. We need the justice system to provide oversight of police precisely because we distrust that their motives will always be pure, their policing fair, and their use of force moderate. John Keane's (2009) concept of "monitory democracy," in capturing the multiple new power monitoring and contesting organizations, institutions, and groups in global society, precisely reveals the power of distrust at the heart of contemporary democracy. In other words, shared *distrust* of the powerful, representatives, state actors, etc., would be as powerful in engendering collective action and cooperation as trust.

Taken together, all three books shine a light on the interplay of technological and media structures and human agency at the dawn of the third decade of the Internet's increasingly mass and global appeal. The first wave of thinking and scholarship about the Internet leaned heavily in the direction of the medium's seeming ability to let people make

the world anew in cyberspace. As Fred Turner (2006) has demonstrated, this imagining of the Internet was the direct descendent of the 1970s back-to-land dreamers who went off to build their own utopian, non-hierarchical societies. It was from this cultural imaginary that John Perry Barlow made his famous "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace." Scholars who followed suit saw the radical recasting of political, social, and economic power. For much of the 2000s, a welcomingly refreshing empiricism settled in to tease out the dynamics of politics, power, and audiences. All too often, however, it seems that the field produced accounts that both underplayed the sweeping social and technological changes of the last 40 years and failed to build new theory to keep pace with them (see Bennett & Iyengar, 2008).

All three of these books, in their own ways, offer paths forward for scholarship. *Forging Trust Communities* rightly puts the emphasis less on technology than on the practice of creating communities and trust that afford collective action. The role of trust in digital collective action deserves further empirical analysis in the field. Franklin's work points to the importance of practice for conceptualizing, analyzing, and understanding the ways that people navigate the larger structures that enable and constrain action. While Franklin is not alone among scholars in calling for a renewed attention to practice (see Couldry, 2012), it strikes me that this is a rich path forward that can potentially unite empirical approaches with the provocative abstractions of critical theory. And, Franklin's focus on big questions of power and resistance is refreshing.

I suspect that Webster's text will set the agenda for the field of communication in the years to come. It offers a powerful theoretical framework and explanatory account of audience attention in ways that bridge sociological traditions of production studies, psychological approaches to media use, and comparatively new fields such as at the intersection of communication and science and technology studies. Webster offers something for everyone: the importance of relational thinking, networks, and the sociology of producers' views of audiences; how preferences are cultivated over time endogenously in a media system; the ways that technological structures shape action; and, how everyday practice, time, and resources shape attention. It is an important work that, I believe, will plant a hundred seeds for interdisciplinary flowers to bloom in the coming years.

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