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John Carey and Martin Elton, *When media are new: Understanding the dynamics of new media adoption and use*

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What is This?

in this book, Collins thus adds to the reading list of those in graduate seminars around the world who are studying the internet and society.

   Some time has gone by since this book was published, but the discussion of British detail and the engagements with important theorists should keep this book on the shelf for a while. Every senior scholar at least secretly harbors the wish that writings published here and there would be gathered together into a book, and Collins has accomplished this. The author's larger take-aways are likely to be taken with many grains of salt by those who have broader and deeper knowledge of global developments in the regulation of the global telecommunications networks of which the internet is the public face. The very facts that someone with Collins' intellectual history should come to the conclusions he does – and that there is such an eager audience for his insights as a public speaker – are, however, in themselves important additions to what we know about this still-mutable subject.

Reference

de Sola Pool, I (1983) *Technologies of Freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

John Carey and Martin Elton, *When media are new: Understanding the dynamics of new media adoption and use*, The University of Michigan Press and The University of Michigan Library: Ann Arbor, MI, 2010; viii + 363 pp.: ISBN 9780472050857, $47.50 (pbk)

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Predicting whether a new medium can be successfully implemented and whether or not it will be widely adopted by its intended users is a tricky business. For example, AT&T introduced the Picturephone – its trademarked videophone service – in the 1960s, first for business customers only, after which they introduced it on the residential market in 1970. AT&T forecasted that by the mid-1980s 2 million Picturephones would be in use. However due to a lack of public acceptance the Picturephone was withdrawn in 1973, leaving AT&T with a financial failure of half a billion dollars (p. 183). In this book, John Carey and Martin Elton provide us with some vivid examples of where the forecasting of the demand for a new medium was either under- or overestimated, as well as supplying a range of cases where the implementation and/or adoption of a medium failed to live up to expectations or triggered new uses. *When Media Are New* offers an historical over-view of new media implementations, where the authors' main thesis is that although we cannot eliminate uncertainty, we can reduce it by looking closely at how media have been implemented in the past. The authors argue that examining media innovation in an historical context will stop us wasting our time on making 'old mistakes', where many failures – like the Picturephone – are based on a 'repeated failure to understand intended users and their needs' (p. 183). *When Media Are New* thus explicitly focuses on the expe-riences of users and on how they react and have reacted to new media. It looks at histori-cal reasons for why users choose to integrate new media in their daily life as well as to explanations for why they failed to adopt certain media over time. From this perspective the book explores how our understanding of patterns of adoption can be of benefit when trying to implement new media technologies or services today.

The book is made up of two parts. The first part looks at processes of media adoption and use. It explores this both on the concrete level of suppliers' implementation and users' adoption of new media, and on the abstract level of forecasting methods and user needs research with respect to new media. The second part provides six case studies of particular media or particular media contexts and how they developed over time. They focus on how new video technologies affected television-viewing behaviour, on video telephones and teleconferencing, on the development of the web in the context of videotex and teletext, on the development of Interactive Television (ITV), on the implementation and adoption of satellite radio, and on the integration of mobile phones into everyday life. The book lacks an overall conclusion, which would have been helpful in tying established traits and patterns more closely together.

Carey and Elton are two experienced authors from diverse backgrounds (anthropology and management science) both with an impressive track record in researching new media. They have been working together on various research projects for over 30 years, during which they have (both together and separately) conducted research on various aspects of media adoption, use, and behaviour, including media research for industry clients. They use their wide array of research findings in new media implementation and innovation to illustrate the case studies and examples used throughout the book. This comes accompanied by an interdisciplinary approach to the topic, using methods and insights from amongst others sociology, social psychology, mass communication, anthropology, ethnography, and economics.

When Media Are New is part of the *digitalcuturebooks* series of the University of Michigan Library and Press. The books in this series are made available in print and online under a Creative Commons license to encourage wider (digital) distribution. The text of the online, freely readable version of *When Media Are New* is the same as the print version with the addition of occasional hyperlinks that redirect you to other places in the text where a certain topic is discussed. The free online availability of the book is of great benefit to researchers and practitioners in the field for discovery of the book, for easily sharing it with others, and for its use for pedagogic purposes. It would have been nice to have the book also available as a downloadable PDF or in EPUB format to read on ereaders. The print book is also accompanied by a separate book website that amongst others features has a collection of supplementary materials (images, graphs and tables). It would have been useful if this website had been more closely integrated with the online version of the book, where it would have offered the opportunity to enhance the digital edition with images and other additional information, in this sense making more of an expanded use of the possibilities the digital medium offers.

When Media Are New provides historical background to new media development, to prevent 'people unwittingly mak[ing] mistakes that others have made before' (p. 3). It links media to the specific technological conditions and socio-cultural contexts out of which they emerged, criticizing the perceived timelessness of new media. However, the book is very much directed towards media (implementation) now and in the future, where the examples and case studies are read in the light of the now, of understanding users and their needs in the contemporary age. In parts of the book this leads to teleological strands of reasoning, where the emphasis is on patterns and similarities instead of, for instance, on discontinuities, anomalies and ruptures in a media's history that defy an

internal developmental logic. In this respect it would have been interesting if the authors had explored a media archaeology-informed approach (focusing on differences in their own right) next to the methodologies already used, to counter and challenge this future-oriented reading of media primarily focused on a better understanding of the present condition of new media.

When Media Are New offers a compelling read and provides a variety of interesting historical case studies, giving much-needed context to new media implementation and use that will be valuable for researchers, practitioners, and students alike. Although it doesn't offer solutions, it promises that we can reduce uncertainty if we pay closer attention to the past.