

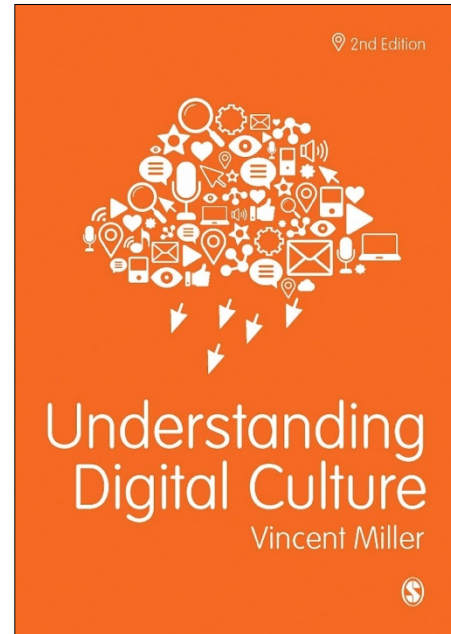
Vincent Miller, **Understanding Digital Culture (2nd ed.)**, London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2020, 331 pp., \$104.64 (hardcover).

Reviewed by

Admilson Veloso da Silva

Corvinus University of Budapest

The intersection of technology and contemporary society is a rich field for academic exploration, and it has become trendy in communication science, especially with the rise of the Internet, smartphones, social media platforms, and artificial intelligence, to mention a few. In addition to that, it is also a constantly and rapidly changing topic due to new inventions and their appropriation by users. In **Understanding Digital Culture**, author Vincent Miller explores, explains, and analyzes aspects related to digital culture from both descriptive and critical perspectives. The author opens the book by providing a review of previous technologies, more specifically television in the second half of the 20th century and discusses it as a “revolutionary technology” with the contributions of Raymond Williams (1975/1990). In this review, I will start by presenting an overview of Miller’s work, the author’s main ideas, the structure of the book, and a discussion of its strengths, weaknesses, and contributions to digital culture research.



Despite television and the Internet being initially two different technologies with their popularization decades apart, Williams (1975/1990) is introduced by the author to describe how TV was invented as an outcome of combined scientific and technical research, resulting in a medium that helps our societies access information and entertainment but also that has altered our basic perceptions of reality and how we form social relationships. In connection with that, the author claims that most of Williams’s (1975/1990) statements about the invention and influence of television in our society could now be leveled at the Internet, creating a connection between the two media formats. However, the author seeks to avoid a strictly and solely technological determinism or a social and economic determinism of technology by discussing the notion of intention: the purposes and practices that come with new technologies, or technological enablement.

Hence, the structure of the book is organized in a way that provides the social and economic impacts of the information society but also analyzes the cultural forms that are developing alongside the technologies from a cultural studies approach with updated practical examples. Thus, Miller arranges a literature piece that combines the understanding of economic implications with the production, uses, and consumption of digital media and multimedia (p. 10). The nine main chapters could be divided into three main blocks of subjects (not clearly stated as separated parts in the book): The first group introduces the basis of the technology itself and then explains the key economic elements of digital culture with its technical processes, cultural forms, and the experiences that are enabled within; the second part covers chapters about privacy, surveillance, security, and information politics; and the last block is dedicated to analyzing aspects of identity, relationships, and the body.

Copyright © 2022 (Admilson Veloso da Silva, [milsonvelososilva@gmail.com](mailto:milsonvelososilva@gmail.com)). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

Thus, the nine chapters cover, individually, the ground for the initial comprehension of what the author means by digital culture, then further explore aspects of the economic foundations of the information age (from postindustrial to globalized, networked societies) and the media convergence and cross-media experiences enabled by new technologies nowadays, in which content production has turned into a "produsage" type (audience actively engaged in the production/consumption processes).

After these three initial sections, chapters 4–6 present the issues of surveillance and data privacy with its political and commercial reverberations; the information politics and online public sphere with its implications (bots, fake news, social mobilization, populist discourses online); cybercrime, cyberterrorism and cyberwarfare affecting the economy; and the good function of states.

Chapters 7–9 cover digital identity and the "recentering" of the individual from a poststructuralist perspective in light of digital age enablement (online profiles and social networks, selfies, etc.); the interconnection of spaces, Internet, and human-computer relationships, resulting in the possibility of "virtual communities" (or a networked society); and, lastly, the relation of body and technology with the rise of a posthuman thought, the embodiment/disembodiment enabled by new technologies (from a constant connection via smartphones to humanlike cyborgs).

Among the positive elements of the book, two characteristics are noteworthy. First, it supplies the reader with a vast literature and indications of further readings for each chapter by revisiting other relevant traditional and contemporary authors such as Manuel Castells (1996/2000), Erving Goffman (1959), Stuart Hall (1990), Henry Jenkins (2006), Lev Manovich (2001), Sherry Turkle (2011), and José van Dijck (2014). Secondly, the structure of the book offers, in many of its chapters, practical and contemporary revisions of its discussions via up-to-date case studies that facilitate the topic's empirical understanding and provides further evidence of its implications for societies, illustrating how the technologies are embraced by distinct groups. To indicate one example, the case study section in chapter 3, which is about convergence and the contemporary media experience, mentions how digital music production and consumption have transformed in past decades with platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music.

A weakness of the book is its intent to cover a too-broad set of issues and theories since the author is aiming at further reinforcing the concept of digital culture in our contemporary society. Some may also blame the book for a universalistic approach to technology when going from videogame narratives to immersive movies, from cyberwar incidents to online dating. However, despite the vast choice of topics, Miller has managed to show their connection and relevance by clearly illustrating how pervasive technology is nowadays, not only from a technical angle but also from a substantial critical and theoretical analysis.

The book can provide a considerable source of knowledge for both teachers who are lecturing on subjects related to digital media and researchers who are willing to further discuss phenomena connected to its covered subjects. For teaching purposes, lecturers can assign chapters and cases to groups of students for reading and developing a joint analysis of both theory and practice, with collective learning via shared presentations and discussions in class. For researchers, the book can be used either as a solid foundation to explain digital culture from a broader perspective or via its specific topics to deepen the understanding of those subjects covered in each chapter.

Finally, it is not without surprise that *Understanding Digital Culture* has become a highly cited work in academia and an acclaimed resource by other scholars. The continuous ubiquity and pervasiveness of new technologies, associated with scientific and technical research, will likely reinforce the author's ideas about our information society even more in coming years.

### References

- Castells, M. (2000). *The information age: Economy, society and culture, Vol. 1: The rise of the network society*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell. (Original work published 1996)
- Dijck, J. van. (2014). Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: Big data between scientific paradigm and ideology. *Surveillance & Society, 12*(2), 197–208. <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v12i2.4776>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Hall, S. (1990). Who needs "identity"? In P. du Gay, J. Evans, & P. Redman (Eds.), *Identity: A reader* (pp. 15–30). London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Manovich, L. (2001). *The language of new media*. London, UK: MIT Press.
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York, NY: Basic.
- Williams, R. (1990). *Television: Technology and cultural form*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. (Original work published 1975)