

Michael Mario Albrecht, **Trumping the Media: Politics and Democracy in the Post-Truth Era**, London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2022, 232 pp., \$108.00 (hardcover).

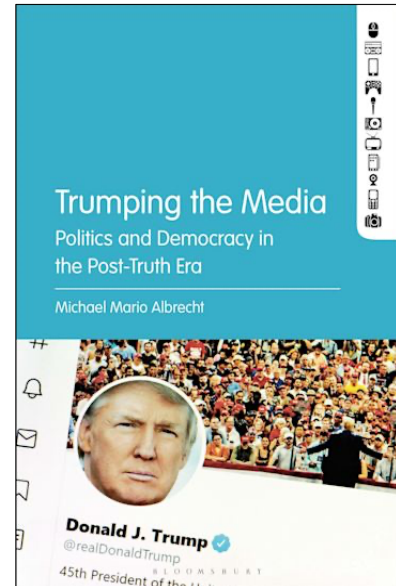
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The dynamic relationship between Donald Trump and the media stands as a multifaceted and influential aspect of contemporary media and political discourse. Throughout his tenure as a public figure and as the 45th president of the United States, Trump harnessed the power of media in unconventional ways. His adept utilization of mediums like talk radio, reality TV, and social media, notably Twitter, allowed him to circumvent conventional communication channels and directly connect with his supporters. A timely book, **Trumping the Media: Politics and Democracy in the Post-Truth Era**, exemplifies the evolving interplay between Trump and the modern media landscape, shaping not only political narratives but also the public's perception of reality.

The author, Michael Mario Albrecht, held the position of lecturer of communication studies at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, at the time of publication. His research centers on the transformative impact of Donald Trump's political leadership in the contemporary political landscape of the 21st century. Albrecht's expertise spans multiple disciplines, encompassing areas such as popular music, television, and politics. Notably, he skillfully traces the origins of Trumpism, drawing insightful connections from Robert McChesney's "political economy of media" (p. 3) to Hannah Arendt's concept of the "big lie" (p. 7).

The book explores the rise of Donald Trump and the role of the media in shaping public opinion during his presidency. Albrecht argues that the media's coverage of Trump was often sensationalized and lacked the necessary context and analysis, contributing to the rise of "post-truth" politics. The book examines the historical and cultural factors that led to Trump's victory in the 2016 election and the subsequent polarization of American society. It also delves into the changing nature of media in the digital age and the impact of social media on political discourse.

The book comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 delves into the author's argument that politics and electronic media have been intertwined since the radio's inception. Trump adopted the media as it evolved from radio and television to Web-based news media and social media platforms. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss how talk radio and reality TV aided in Trump becoming a celebrity and cultivating his audience. Albrecht perfectly stated that "Trump has lived his life as a celebrity, won the election as a celebrity, and governed as a celebrity" (p. 13). Chapter 4 contends that Trump effectively utilized Twitter to directly communicate with his audience, while traditional news media covered these interactions. Chapter 5 explores how White supremacist groups rallied around Donald Trump's campaign, leveraging online partisan media to



disseminate a more digestible form of their hateful rhetoric. Chapters 6 and 7 delve into how Trump consistently disregarded traditional media outlets and how these outlets normalized his habitual indifference toward facts. Across the book, Albrecht adopted a holistic approach, merging historical context and media and political theories to paint a comprehensive picture of media and politics within the post-truth era.

The author conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis, skillfully crafting narratives that delve into Trump's intricate connections with truth, reality, and modern media. This meticulous analysis draws upon a diverse range of existing discourses sourced from editorials, think pieces, commentaries, and established literature. The meta-analysis provides a broad overview; however, it may not capture the nuanced details that are crucial for a deep understanding of Trump's connections with truth, reality, and media. Additionally, the heavy reliance on existing discourses raises concerns about potential biases present in these sources.

The core concept of this book revolves around Trumpism, a construct amplified by the media. The book explores how Trump's distinctive modes of media presence reshape the contemporary political landscape. A related perspective, mediatization, asserts that the media plays a substantial role in shaping and organizing the mechanics of political communication within the context of society. Couldry and Hepp (2013) contend that the media, functioning as a distinct social institution, operates by certain principles referred to as "media logic," requiring nonmedia entities to conform to these principles to effectively represent themselves within a media-driven culture. Trump deftly exemplifies this "media logic," thereby setting a precedent for his successor in the realm of mediatization. Similarly, Block (2013) underscores the media's symbolic prowess in constructing realities and their influential capability in shaping the prevailing ideological milieu.

The author articulates how Fox News and talk radio helped to construct "an echo chamber for discourses to circulate among their viewers and listeners" (p. 57). Simultaneously, an exploration of the influence of social media's algorithmic filtering and its contribution to echo chambers could fortify the author's argument. The algorithms employed by social media platforms give rise to filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011), encouraging users to generate and propagate hyperpartisan content (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018). In a parallel manner, these filter bubbles engender echo chambers, allowing politically like-minded individuals to connect with one another.

In the chapter titled "Post-truth, Fake News, and Postmodernism," Albrecht adeptly expounds on three discourses while analyzing Trump's correlation with them. The majority of credible and conventional news outlets normalized Trump's unbridled disregard for factual accuracy. This was evident even when he asserted, without providing substantiation, that the 2020 election had been manipulated. Strikingly, a significant portion of his supporters staunchly subscribed to his personalized version of reality. The author's assertion, "Lying is not a bug but a feature of the postmodern version of truth and self that Trump performs" (p. 178), encapsulates this perspective. Albrecht contends that an effective countermeasure against Trump's post-truth rhetoric is rigorous fact-checking. Nevertheless, scholars identified a substantial disparity between fabricated news stories and the availability of fact-checking resources (Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2018).

Likewise, Albrecht argues that both scholars and political figures must usher in a new era of politics within the post-truth, postmodern era, wherein emphasis is placed on equity and inclusivity. Additionally,

he proposes the integration of fresh forms of activism and scholarly pursuits to effectively harness modern media technologies, thereby countering the prevalence of post-truth narratives. Scholars and political actors need to take these solutions seriously to dismiss the potential use of hate and demagoguery.

Overall, the book is a timely contribution to the scholarship of media and communication, and I suspect it will become a necessary addition to those who critically engage with the evolving relationship between Trump narratives and his relations to truth, reality, and media in the contemporary world. As such, I recommend this book and thank Albrecht for his important work on this topic.

References

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