Xigen Li, **Emerging Media: Uses and Dynamics**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2016, 330 pp., $49.95 (paperback).

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The uses and effects of new media have long been popular research topics in academia, but even more so today as the diffusion of information and communication technology constantly alters and expands traditional communication processes by offering new means to access, share, and store information. *Emerging Media: Uses and Dynamics* by Xigen Li is an insightful contribution to the investigation of these new ways of communication, featuring a compilation of both theoretical and empirical studies on how new media adoption and use have positively influenced people's online involvement and expression, information exchange, and social interaction in the networked world.
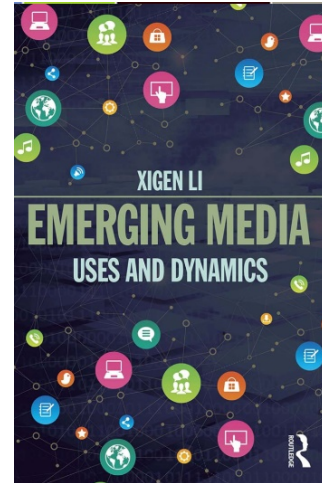
Building on Li's (2006) earlier work on Internet newspapers as viable, revolutionary platforms for online journalism, the book begins by proposing the term *emerging media*, instead of *new media*, to more delicately reflect the constantly evolving nature of the so-called new media brought forth by digital technology. Such media are not, strictly speaking, "new" but comprise "a hybrid of old and new" (p. 2), usually born out of and converged with already-existing media through ongoing technological advancement and adaptation. As such, there really is no old or new media per se, as they all belong to "an evolutionary continuum" (p. 2) and tend to be compatible with each other to some extent. Consequently, communication processes and behaviors in the advent of new media become multifaceted and involve cross-domain activities. Li uses this concept of *hybridness* as a point of departure to embrace a comprehensive perspective, rather than a discipline-, technology-, or time-specific one, for examining the uses and dynamics of emerging media. He encourages communication scholars to adopt and test theories from different fields and to develop new, broad theoretical lenses—that cut across time, culture, and technology—to examine the adoption of emerging media and the consequent social and behavioral changes.

This proposition seems in stark contrast with the traditional object-centered approach (Moon & Nass, 1990), wherein digital media is studied as a whole and compared with other, often older or nondigital, technologies (e.g., smartphones vs. feature phones) to highlight the distinctions between the two. Such a holistic view of technology makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact source of a specific effect since the comparison is done without identifying the key characteristics of the technology that induce the observed effect (Moon & Nass, 1990), thereby limiting the generalizability of findings and theories of one technology to another. Li's approach, on the other hand, does not focus on merely comparing newer media (and their effects) with preceding ones, but rather specifies a number of factors—ranging from technological to nontechnological and from legal to extralegal—that significantly influence the adoption and use of emerging media. Throughout its 12 chapters arranged in three parts, the book traces these

factors based on multiple theories from not only communication but also multi- and cross-disciplinary literatures, and synthesizes them to bolster a comprehensive understanding of the issues, relationships, and patterns involved in emerging media.

Specifically, Part I reviews a plethora of technology-acceptance literature and presents refined theoretical frameworks for analyzing the patterns of media adoption and use. In chapter 1, Li argues that newly emerged media are not always largely different from or superior to existing ones, as new media emerge regularly and groundbreaking technological innovations now occur at a slower rate. This suggests that nontechnological factors (e.g., perceived information quality) are becoming more important in new media adoption than the affordances and innovativeness of the technologies themselves. The next chapter brings the convergent, multifunctional nature of emerging media into the analysis by showing how mobile phones are being used as news devices even though their main function is to make phone calls, which Li refers to as a second-degree adoption of a technology's distinctive multimedia function for purposes other than the originally intended one. The author then shifts focus from media adoption to media use in chapter 3 and provides an absorbing analysis of how the relative cost of accessing information from a medium (aka perceived channel efficiency) and individual motivations for seeking information contribute to media dependency.

From Part II on, Li examines the processes and implications of online activities facilitated by web-based new media, such as social networks, online communities, file sharing, public discussion forums, and microblogs. In chapters 4 through 7, Li shows that the quality and intensity of information exchange on social networking sites, as well as information contribution to online communities, are largely determined by perceived network characteristics (e.g., density, heterogeneity, centrality, receptiveness) and the degree to which users perceive the value of contribution and the likelihood of reward. Here, he also pays attention to the negative aspects of the unauthorized, illegal exchange of information, often carried out via online file sharing and, as a possible strategy to deter online copyright infringement, suggests promoting user awareness of the legal factor of possible punishment as well as the extralegal factor of perceived stigma. Overall, the author sees the dramatic increase in information exchange and the diversification of online activities as resulting directly from new media use, ultimately expanding notions of self and other by making the communication process more interactive and intricate.

In the last part of the book, Li addresses opinion expression and social interaction online by employing the notion of the Internet as a public sphere that encourages political discussion and disagreement in order to form public opinion. The studies presented in chapters 8 through 12 nicely cover the increasingly influential role of online media as a virtual discussion forum for social and political issues, examining the various psychological, normative, and contextual antecedents for the willingness to express disagreement and minority views online. With their convenient access and broad reach to audiences, online media make it easier to express opinions. Yet, sharing an opinion, especially one that goes against the majority view, is a challenging task for many since people tend to conform to social norms favoring homogeneous opinions over disagreements. Li argues that, despite sociopsychological constraints, "disagreement expression is essential for deliberative democracy" (p. 197) and new media such as online newspapers and microblogs are vital tools for generating and exchanging diverse opinions that can lead to meaningful discussions on public issues.

Ironically, the book's key limitation comes from what Li considers its biggest strength—a broad, multidisciplinary approach to the investigation of emerging media. Such a universal perspective is certainly useful in drawing an overall picture of the adoption, use, and effects of emerging media, but this seems to oversimplify the integral role of organizational, social, and cultural differences in shaping communication processes and outcomes. Likewise, the book refers to the Internet and emerging media almost interchangeably, while discussing studies mainly conducted in the context of general online communication without delving deeply into more recently popular media such as smartphones, smartwatches, and virtual reality headsets in the contexts of mobile, wearable, or virtual communication. This is perhaps attributable to Li's early-career background in professional journalism and his longtime research focus on Internet newspapers as mainstream media, which might have influenced him to synthesize the book's core insights primarily in terms of Internet communication. It could also be because the studies cited in the book were mostly conducted between 2007 and 2010 (i.e., before the emergence of the latest new media). Nonetheless, these limitations do not undermine the book's discerning contribution to the scholarship on dynamic online communication processes facilitated by emerging media. This line of research will surely continue to expand, and *Emerging Media: Uses and Dynamics* will no doubt prove a source of inspiration for scholarship yet to come, imparting a considerable breadth of knowledge to researchers and students interested in media, communication, and information science studies.

References

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