

Review

Tim Highfield (2016) *Social Media and Everyday Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, paperback, pp 220, ISBN 0745691358, £14.41.

The book represents the outcome of the author's research during his PhD and postdoctoral study at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia, from 2008 to 2015. Tim Highfield has recently been appointed assistant professor at the University of Amsterdam¹. The book engages with an empirical and theoretical study on social media and everyday politics. Highfield's empirical study mainly consists of digital research methods and his theoretical angle is rooted in Cultural Studies. The book consists of seven chapters, each of which focuses on specific aspects of everyday social media and politics.

My argument guiding this analysis is that social media afford the opportunity for different groups, including citizens, traditional political actors and journalists, to contribute to, discuss, challenge and participate in diverse aspects of politics in a public, shared context. In doing so, social media centralize and demonstrate the overlap between different political practices and topics. If ultimately they do not lead to increased formal participation, then they still reshape and facilitate new informal ways of political talk and action.

While I much appreciate the author's effort to bring together social media and everyday politics, I have some reservations that I would like to briefly touch upon. The book tends to overemphasise the creativity and activity of users on the web and thereby fetishizes everyday practices of people. The book advances a culturalistic understanding of participation and thereby ignores questions of ownership of platforms, profit and class. The Internet is dominated by corporations that accumulate capital by commodifying users. With the help of legal instruments such as privacy policies and terms of use, social media have the right to store, analyse and sell personal data of their users to third parties for targeted advertising in order to accumulate profit.

¹ See: <http://www.uva.nl/en/profile/h/i/t.j.highfield/t.j.highfield.html>

Due to this logic, the co-founder and CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, belongs to the richest people in the world.

More generally, the book tends to ignore the workings of capitalism. While there is a lengthy discussion about how individuals participate and engage online, the book hardly discusses issues such as digital monopolies and power asymmetries. Powerful political and economic actors are very successful in raising visibility and attracting publicity in cyberspace. Due to capitalist structures of the Internet, asymmetrical distributions of material resources, and the logic of the culture industries, political participation and social movements are confronted with marginalisation and disappearing attention on the Internet. Social networking is shaped by individualised communication and corporate interests and such platforms are not *a priori* political and critical places. Corporate social media are ideological platforms because they provide the illusionary impression that everyone now has the opportunity to present themselves to the public and to receive attention, while most people on web 2.0 are marginalised and invisible, and cannot influence political decisions and define cultural values compared to big business, high-profile politicians and celebrities. The material resources of participation are asymmetrical and indicate the limitations of freedom of speech on new media. Structural inequalities and power relations stratify public visibility and participation online. The problem is that the Internet culture cannot be separated from the political economy, which is not adequately taken into account in this book.

The book is an easy read and the overall argument is quickly understood. It is a comprehensive and thorough application of a Cultural Studies approach to digital platforms and social media. However, some limitations can be mentioned such as the lack of the discussion of capitalist logics in the digital age.

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