Book Reviews

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Handbook of Digital Politics
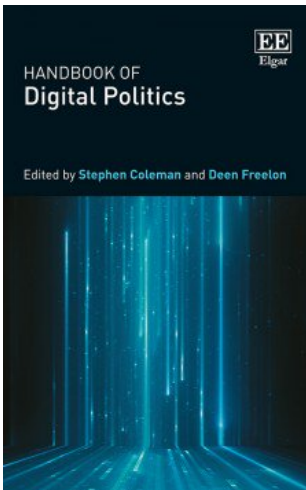   **by: Stephen Coleman (editor), Deen Freelon (editor)**
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It is difficult to imagine the emergence of the internet, a world-changing development, without accepting its inevitable influence on how politics are administered, at the present era.

Internet footprint can be traced back in the way politics is expressed, depicted and reflected upon.

It would be difficult to imagine how a development as world-changing as the emergence of the internet could have taken place without having some impact upon the ways in which politics is expressed, conducted, depicted and reflected upon.

The Handbook of Digital Politics explores that impact in a series of chapters written by some of the world's leading internet researchers. This volume is a must-read for students, researchers and practitioners interested in the continuous changing landscape of political communication.

Politics continue to evolve in the digital era, spurred in part by the accelerating pace of technological development.

This cutting-edge Handbook includes the latest research into the relationship between digital information, communication technologies and politics.

Written by leading scholars in the field, the chapters, arranged in seven parts explore the following: theories of digital politics, government and policy, collective action and civic engagement, political talk, journalism, internet governance and new frontiers in digital political research. The contributors' main focus is the politics behind the implementation of digital technologies in modern society.

For those studying politics, media and communication, journalism, science and sociology this book will be an exceptionally useful resource for their study and research.

Political expounders seeking information on digital strategies, as well as web and other digital practitioners that want to gain more expert knowledge about political applications will also find this book of particular interest.

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Chapter contents

Stephen Coleman and Deen Freelon, editors of the 7-part collective volume, present the key concepts of the book in an introductory chapter on *Conceptualising Digital Politics*. They underline their intention to define digital politics and to present its current trends and future perspectives, stressing an effort to formulate an agenda for future research in these respective fields, and in the ways that digital politics may influence political communication.

Part I, on *Theorizing Digital Politics*, is opened up by Peter Dahlgren (Chapter 2, *The Internet as a Civic Space*), who discusses how the internet has transformed traditional

forms of civic spaces and underlines the significance of civic cultures for that transformation. In the following chapters, Nick Couldry (Chapter 3, *The Social Foundations of Future Digital Politics*) presents and questions the way political processes and civic engagement are implemented in the digital world; William H. Dutton and Elizabeth Dubois (Chapter 4, *The Fifth Estate: A Rising Force of Pluralistic Accountability*) discuss the issue of public accountability and, as a consequence, the importance of transparency at an individual and collective level for citizens and political entities; and Jen Schradie (Chapter 5, *Silicon Valley Ideology and Class Inequality: A Virtual Poll Tax on Digital Politics*) develops the argument that online politics is not a space of equity but rather one dominated by an elite, using what happens in USA as an example.

In Part II, on *Government and Policy*, Fadi Hirzalla and Liesbet van Zoonen set out (Chapter 6, *Online Voting Advice Applications: Foci, Findings and Future of an Emerging Research Field*) to present voting advice applications, their functionalities and potential end users, and discuss their pros and cons for electoral systems. Thad Hall (Chapter 7, *Internet Voting: The State of the Debate*) analyses the pros and cons of internet voting, and considers advantages and disadvantages, as far as accessibility on the one end and security on the other are concerned. Daniel Kreiss (Chapter 8, *Digital Campaigning*) focuses on the case of USA and analyses the way that digital technologies have transformed political campaigning processes. The author stresses the fact that campaigning processes take place more and more on digital platforms, rather than in traditional political arenas. Scott Wright (Chapter 9, *e-Petitions*) moves on to describes the *raison d'etre* of digital petitioning mechanisms, as well as their functionalities and power as a civic engagement tool; and Neil Benn (Chapter 10, *Argumentation Tools for Digital Politics: Addressing the Challenge of Deliberation in Democracies*) presents computer supported argument visualisation (CSAV) technologies and discusses their potential role in political deliberation processes, providing concrete examples of their use.

Part III on Collective Action and Civic Engagement is introduced by W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (Chapter 11, The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and The Personalization of Contentious Politics), writing about the ways that digital media influence the flourishing of bottom-up collective action and civic engagement. Chris Wells, Emily Vraga, Kjerstin Thorson, Stephanie Edgerly and Leticia Bode (Chapter 12, Youth Civic Engagement) present their own research outcomes on whether young people's civic engagement and involvement in public affairs improves thanks to digital media. And this discussion is concluded by Yunhwan Kim and Erik Amnå (Chapter 13, Internet Use and Political Engagement in Youth), who take stock of quantitative research results to discuss digital media as an enabler for improving youth political engagement at the individual level.

In Part IV, on *Political Talk*, Todd Graham (Chapter 14, *Everyday Political Talk in the Internet-Based Public Sphere*) embarks to analyse political discourse formats, the way political talk is expressed online, and how online political talk may strengthen deliberative processes. The author highlights the significance of informal political talk in the digital public sphere. In the following chapters, Christopher Birchall and Stephen Coleman (Chapter 15, *Creating Spaces for Online Deliberation*) focus on how effective and efficient virtual public spaces may be created taking into consideration existing literature on tools, structures, protocols, interfaces that influence the deliberation

experience itself; Dhavan V. Shah, Kathleen Bartzen Culver, Alex Hanna, Timothy Mcafee, and JungHwan Yang (Chapter 16, *Computational Approaches to Online Political Expression: Rediscovering a "Science of the Social"*) present research on how computational methods may be used to collect and analyse public data, giving concrete examples based on conversations on Twitter; and Nick Anstead and Ben O'Loughlin (Chapter 17, *Two-screen Politics: Evidence, Theory and Challenges*) focus on the phenomenon of viewers watching TV and simultaneously posting all types of relevant content to the internet. The authors discuss the effect of such an interaction and the merging of televisual and social media to deliberative democratic processes.

Part V on *Journalism* starts with Axel Bruns and Tim Highfield (Chapter 18, *From News Blogs to News on Twitter: Gatewatching and Collaborative News Curation*) defining news blogging and curation as types of gatewatching and collaborative new production, while remaining skeptical about the use of the term 'citizen journalism'. This part continues with Michael A. Xenos (Chapter 19, *Research on the Political Implications of Political Entertainment*), who analyses political entertainment with an emphasis in political comedy and the way it influences and is influenced by current communication trends; and it is concluded by Neil Thurman (Chapter 20, *Journalism, Gatekeeping and Interactivity*), who presents how the function of gatekeeping has changed over time and how technology as well as consumers of gatekeeping services are influencing it.

Part VI on *Internet Governance* encompasses two chapters: Giles Moss (Chapter 21, *Internet Governance, Rights and Democratic Legitimacy*) refers to what the author considers as the most important issue of concern regarding internet governance: not whether the internet can be governed, but how it should be governed; and Christian Fuchs (Chapter 22, *Social Media Surveillance*) focuses on the issue of privacy in the digital public sphere against surveillance practices, and discusses whether and how the social and economic environments of reference in each case, as well as global politics, influence these practices.

In the concluding part of this volume (Part VII, Expanding the Frontiers of Digital Politics Research), Katy Parry (Chapter 23, Visibility and Visualities: 'Ways of Seeing' Politics in the Digital Media Environment) outsketches a future research field, focused on how digital communication influences the advancement of visual political content online; Ross Petchler and Sandra González-Bailon (Chapter 24, Automated Content Analysis of Online Political Communication) discuss content analysis methodologies and to the enabling possibilities that digital technologies offer, using online political communication as a case; and Deen Freelon, in the last chapter of the volume (On the Cutting Edge of Big Data: Digital Politics Research in the Social Computing Literature) focuses on computational research methodologies and presents the concept of social computing as a potential field for new scientific exploration.

Significance for the state of research and practice

Technology is one of the driving factors of human history. But how it will shape societies and political systems depends on its implementation through companies and governments, and its adaption through citizens (Körner, 2019). The way we access and treat public information and the way civic engagement and political participation are performed are indicative examples of the change and the evolution that political communication is facing over the last years. Composed by contributions from high

profile scholars and edited by leading experts in the field of political communication, the *Handbook of Digital Politics* offers a comprehensive overview of the way political communication is evolving over time and feeds the debate on digital politics, as an external or autonomous driver for transformations in existing political and social orderings (Kaufmann and Jeandesboz, 2017). Social media are an indicative example of the progressive transformation under way over the years on how in both levels, individual and collective, we act and react in the public domain. These platforms are clearly playing a key role in structuring political discourse, social movements and collective identity, and have reshaped the way that governments and citizens operate, along with formal and informal civil communities that employ social media platforms to get engaged in political affairs and processes (Treré, 2016).

The *Handbook of Digital Politics* comes of substantial value to digital politics researchers and practitioners, as it enlightens the way participation in the digital era requires not just rational understanding, but essentially embodied comprehension (Dufva and Dufva, 2019) and an in-depth grasp of the information and communication environments and constraints which shape – and are shaped by – politics and policy-making. The volume offers a very interesting look into the "lawless digital environment" that nowadays dominates political affairs at a local, national and international level. The guidance that this volume provides for future research is particularly interesting, as the significance of digital politics, in the editors' own words, "depends upon where one happens to be standing and how one is looking".

Significance for managers and instructors

In the era of disruptive politics and algorithmic governance, the design and uses of digital technologies prove more often than not to be biased, with governments and private actors exercising power over citizens, organisations and institutions. In this respect, the *Handbook of Digital Politics* is of great value for policy makers and public officials, as a guide to understand how digital technologies are adapting to and transforming the political world. In a way, the materials of the volume can be considered as a solid basis for *digi-grasping*, defined as "active, embodied sense-making and existing in the interface between the digital and physical worlds" (Dufva and Dufva, 2019).

Given that a key aspect of any political system is how its actors and citizens communicate, this book is of great interest for scholars, students, researchers and practitioners working in political communication and interested in the ways that digital technologies are lending themselves to, and at the same time transforming, the world of politics. By analysing cutting edge themes such as theories of digital politics, government and policy, collective action and civic engagement, political talk, journalism, internet governance, the *Handbook of Digital Politics* concerns the broader community of IT developers and civil society organisations concerned with technologies for political and public practice. From a political science perspective, the use of ICTs for political purposes is a relatively new research field as the first publications date back in the 1980s. This volume, therefore, is of substantial interest for the research community, as it opens up a discussion on new frontiers in digital politics research, and especially so on research on the interplay between digital information, communication technologies and politics. The layout and organisation of the book are user friendly, as the volume is structured in a way that encourages further reading, at the same time challenging readers' critical appraisal and self-reflection on the different topics presented.

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