

Book Reviews

John V. Pavlik. *Media in the Digital Age.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 346p. alk. paper, \$74.50 cloth (ISBN 9780231142083), \$24.50 paper (ISBN 9780231142090). LC2007-41386.

A book entitled *Media in the Digital Age* could be about anything. This one is about everything. As chair of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers University, John Pavlik has spent years researching and promoting new media. His latest work is a compendium of factual information and commentary, less a book to be read straight through than a reference or textbook to be consulted.

The audience for this book is not immediately clear. Pavlik draws on his experience as a journalism professor by incorporating material that appears to have originated in the classroom, but his book is not directed solely at aspiring reporters, editors, and broadcasters. Many topics, such as video games and devices for parental monitoring of Internet use, seem to be addressed to the general reader. Perhaps the choice of topics is simply a reflection of Pavlik's knowledge and interests. He discusses mass public media such as broadcasting and publication and also more personal media such as cell phones, MP3 files, social networking sites, and digital cameras. The book is current as of about 2006–2007. Some of the products and inventions that Pavlik mentions have been superseded by newer models; but, on the whole, lack of currency is not a serious defect.

Pavlik takes a systematic approach to this huge subject by organizing the book into chapters that are clearly defined and distinct from one other: delivery, access, audiences, producers, content, distributors, financiers, regulation, production, inventors, ethics, and children. This approach facilitates reference use and prevents redundancy. Believing that tradi-

tional media need to be early adapters of new technologies, Pavlik describes a wide range of products, tools, and initiatives, from digital television to e-books and cutting-edge trends such as wearability, multifunctionality, and miniaturization. He offers a balanced, middle-of-the-road analysis of controversial questions of privacy, censorship, commercialization, ownership, and media ethics.

Much of this information is familiar, and the treatment is too compressed to provide much context. I did enjoy the description of the \$150 laptop designed for children in developing countries. I was intrigued by the comparison of today's citizen reporters of news to the newspaper "stringers" of the print era. Also valuable is Pavlik's typology of news content according to whether the content is repurposed or original, designed for traditional or digital media. Librarians can learn something from the business models for digital publishing laid out in the chapter on financiers and owners of digital media. On media ethics, Pavlik makes a useful distinction between errors of commission and errors of omission. The same chapter includes an extensive section on the use of promotional video news releases (VNRs) by local news stations, based on the author's original research. His insights into communication between reporters and their sources in the digital age is very interesting.

On broader issues, the book is something of a disappointment. The workmanlike writing sometimes lapses into banality: for example, this Bob Dylan quote: "Songs and music have always inspired me." Pavlik acknowledges both positive and negative social effects of digital media, such as the trend toward decentralization and proliferation of formats, outlets, and producers of content.



He makes the well-known point that media are more interactive in the digital age, with an emphasis on self-expression over authority (although I disagree that the reader of traditional media is necessarily passive).

Pavlik outlines the cataclysmic change that is transforming the media landscape in a disconcertingly deadpan tone. He uses the phrase "bottomless pit of mindless drivel" in relation to content available to children, but with no sense of outrage or urgency. Perhaps he really is sanguine about the future of media in the digital age, or perhaps he is whistling in the dark. The book ends with the admonition that "change in the media is not technologically determined" but does not provide evidence of it. Librarians also take comfort in this slogan, but it seems to me that technologies (at least those that are embraced by consumers) are precisely what *are* driving change in the media. The pace of change may have accelerated in the year or two since this book was written; newspapers today are shrinking and failing at an alarming rate and libraries are becoming increasingly marginalized.

Clearly Pavlik's goal in this book is not to play the role of prophet or media critic. Even so, he might have further developed his ideas on some paradoxes of digital media, such as the simultaneous concentration and dispersion of media owners and outlets or the seeming contradiction between the speeding up of access to information and the abandonment of linearity. Do people still care about the latest news, or is the concept of time becoming irrelevant? No doubt the most profound impacts of digital media will only become clear from the vantage point of the distant future. In the meantime, *Media in the Digital Age* is a serviceable guide to the present. —*Jean Alexander, Carnegie Mellon University.*

Information Literacy Instruction Handbook. Eds. Christopher N. Cox and Elizabeth Blakesley Lindsay. Chicago:

Association of College and Research Libraries, 2008. 236p. alk. paper, \$40 (ISBN 9780838909638). LC2008-03557.

In the summer of 2003 I had the privilege of attending the Information Literacy Immersion program run by ACRL. I had been a reference librarian for over 15 years, but by then had transitioned into a new position within our Instruction Office putting all my efforts into online course development and teaching. Like many reference librarians, I had given my share of presentations over the years and thought I knew a thing or two about teaching, but hoped to pick up a few tips. Instead, I was transformed.

Reading the *Information Literacy Instruction Handbook* reminds me (I assume on purpose) of my time at Immersion. Many Immersion faculty members are contributors to this work and many of the themes of that program are present in it. While reading a book certainly does not have the same effect as living in a college dorm, eating, and meeting with several peers for hours daily for a week, this volume does present the reader with the issues and perspectives on information literacy (IL) instruction present in that program and within the professional organization dedicated to promoting it.

The *Handbook* is a compilation of twelve chapters, each on a different topic, by nineteen total contributors. The reader should expect variations in tone, formality, and approach. Readers who belong to the ILI listserv, the ACRL Instruction Section, or who keep up with the literature of IL instruction will be familiar with most contributors and understand why they wrote on the topics they did. However, the rationale for the selection of some chapter topics is not clear. Although the volume lacks an index, valuable references accompany each chapter.

One defining characteristic of the IL movement is its focus on academic institutions, not libraries. Thus, it is appropriate that Craig Gibson opens the work with a history of the IL movement by way of