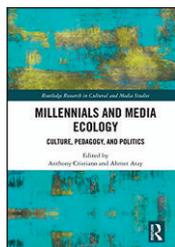


## Review



**Millennials and Media Ecology: Culture, Pedagogy, and Politics.** Edited by Anthony Cristiano & Ahmet Atay. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2020. 192 pp. ISBN: 9780367200251.

*Millennials and Media Ecology: Culture, Pedagogy, and Politics*, edited by Anthony Cristiano and Ahmet Atay, synthesizes a range of perspectives surrounding the media practices of individuals broadly known as the millennial generation. This text is a compilation of entries by researchers/educators based in Canada, the United States, and Germany, with disciplinary backgrounds spanning communication studies, journalism, law and business, philosophy, and sociology. This diversity contributes to what is perhaps the greatest achievement of the book: its ability to portray and unpack the millennial generation as a heterogeneous group within society.

The contents of the text are organized into three sections that outline pertinent considerations of millennial media usage and attitudes within sociocultural, pedagogical, and political environments respectively. The authors effectively achieve their stated aims, offering nuanced analysis “as referring 1) to the affordances of media technology on one hand, and 2) to the socio-cultural practices involving such tools and utilities on the other; and consequently is employed via targeted studies 3) to examine the members of the millennial generation across global socio-cultural contexts” (p. 4).

The distinct value of *Millennials and Media Ecology* rests in the balance it achieves between theoretical analysis and concrete observations of social practice. Each chapter incorporates a differing emphasis on the abstract review of key scholarship and the discussion of social realities or lived experiences. For instance, the contribution by Cristiano insightfully explores the iconic literature of McLuhan, articulating its implications for the contemporary landscape experienced by millennials. Cristiano asserts that ascribing to a deterministic agency of media technologies over human consciousness is problematic in the case of millennials. As a result, this theoretical analysis sets the stage for a recurring theme in the book based upon the unique humanistic and ethical complexes that digital society creates for this generation.

A commitment to theoretical engagement is also captured in the entry by Robinson, in proclaiming that the media saturation experienced by millennials has led to an Apolline or dreamlike (digital) environment. His analysis calls for a necessary counterbalance in the form of the Dionysiac, which is characterized by an embrace of tragedy that allows millennials to “deal with the grisly horrors of life” (p. 116). Robinson provides a case study of social media websites as virtual realities where millennials suspend any notion of the Dionysiac, constructing an unrealistically optimistic conception of their own lives while simultaneously feeling inadequate amongst their peers. This philosophical framework enables the observation of social media as guiding

millennials to living a fractured existence in which any sorrows of life are suppressed by the pressure to maintain an idealistic digital identity.

While possessing the academic complexity required for scholarly literature, *Millennials and Media Ecology* more importantly provides a platform for the voices of the millennial generation themselves. Various chapters facilitate this engagement including the contribution of Novak, which employs the methodology of a qualitative focus group in which millennial postsecondary students discuss their practices of political engagement. Gathering insights from the students allowed the author to shape her analysis according to the sentiments and concerns that directly arise from the lived experiences of these individuals. Novak is able to apply the focus group results to her primary critique of the traditional engagement binary while also legitimizing the concept of “active disengagement” (p. 141) commonly embodied by millennials.

Overall, the book is well written in a language that is accessible for postsecondary students regardless of their prior expertise in communication studies. Furthermore, the book is engaging to read since it employs a vast array of research methodologies including case studies, surveys, statistical analysis, and focus groups. The authors also draw upon their own lived experiences to give the research a distinctly personalized element, overcoming the detached and dehumanized tone that often plagues academic writing. For example, Atay discusses relevant interactions with his millennial students regarding their technology use, demonstrating the personal investment that the authors place upon their research.

The assertions of each author are typically developed in a logical manner with claims effectively supported by research data/findings and contextualized by literary frameworks. The text would have likely benefitted from a concluding section to directly articulate the common significance of the observations within the three realms of culture, pedagogy, and politics. While each chapter is constructed in the comprehensive manner of a stand-alone piece, a brief reflection may have further emphasized the book's value. However, the introductory section provides an excellent precursor of the overall purpose, illustrating the nuances and relevance of the three primary sections. The introduction also effectively acknowledges the difficulties and potential problems with the singular characterization of a millennial generation. The book does tend to approach its analysis based on a North American experience of media engagement; however, there are also chapters centred on millennials in Germany and Poland. While it would have been ideal to incorporate some level of commentary regarding world regions such as Africa and Asia, this is implicitly noted as an area for further research.

As a whole, the book engages with a topic that is commonly explored yet vastly understudied when framed in the specific context of the millennial generation. While the differing areas of focus within each chapter may sometimes inhibit deep analysis, this diversity is a strength when considering the myriad of opportunities for further study that are introduced. This book is a worthy recommendation for undergraduate and graduate students of communication studies, with strong relevance to other disciplines including cultural studies, political science, and youth studies. Furthermore, the normative nature of the analysis makes this text a useful resource for educators of any discipline in promoting a greater understanding of how millennial students engage

with technology. In sum, *Millennials and Media Ecology* provides an excellent base of knowledge for this increasingly important topic and stands to inspire a wealth of future research.

*Davis Vallesi*, York University