
*Virtual Politics* is a collection of 13 papers by 14 scholars and researchers from backgrounds including but not exclusive to law, architecture, rhetoric, philosophy, English, and communications. These contributors have diverse backgrounds encompassing various online experiences with research knowledge regarding the history and development of the Internet. Kolko opens the book by stating that there is a need to understand the reciprocal relationship between online and offline experiences; the virtual affects the physical and the physical affects the virtual. We can no longer be content with research that dichotomizes virtuality and physicality, situating them as opposites. How technology and culture intersect and overlap in different contexts and environments is often inadequately explored unless an interdisciplinary approach is used, which is what this edited collection sets out to do.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1, “Users and the Structure of Technology,” includes five papers that persuade the reader to rethink notions of “social structure and policy” in light of people’s increased online presence in recent years. Papers stemming from law, architecture, politics, and philosophy demonstrate to the reader that there are many issues left unaddressed and questions that have not been asked within existing research and literature. Chapter 1 sets the stage of the collection by problematizing how we think technology has affected our lives, with subsequent chapters outlining new issues that have surfaced with increased Internet use and how issues such as privacy and trust must be revisited when thinking about online experiences.

Part 2, “Technology and the Structure of Communities,” continues the investigation into the reciprocal relationship between online and offline with eight selected papers from the fields of television studies, feminism, media studies, education, drama, and community networks. These papers broaden the current understanding of how the Internet has affected community formation and the social interaction taking place online. In this section, the reader is left questioning previous theoretical perspectives concerning physical communities and face-to-face interactions and whether these are truly applicable to online social spaces. Papers in Part 2 demonstrate people’s lived experiences of technology, how these are fluid and changing daily, and how people can benefit in diverse ways from physical and virtual convergences. For example, chapter 7 examines how women might make use of the Internet for feminist community-building and political advocacy, situating technology as potentially empowering to women as both designers and users of technology.

Because the contributions are interdisciplinary, a variety of theories and methods are used; conversational analysis, ethnography, and narrative analysis, for example, permit readers to step outside their own paradigms to broaden how they might conceptualize issues prevalent within Internet research. By not adhering to one methodological process or theoretical paradigm when researching the complex relations between online and offline experiences, this collection helps researchers work toward developing a rich and complex understanding of “Internet studies,” bridging disciplines and creating a thorough framework for future research.

How does the Internet affect our lives, and how do our experiences and the varied contexts of these experiences affect how the Internet might be used in online communities? The reader will take from this collection not only the varied approaches to answering these complex questions, but also a sense of how the virtual and physical overlap and converge in our daily lives. Clearly illustrated in this edited collection is the complexity of Internet studies—or how multifaceted Internet studies should be. What is particularly useful from the range of perspectives provided by contributors is that each discipline asks very different questions about the effects of technology on culture and society.
The papers in this collection adequately consider the implications of the intersections and convergences between the virtual and physical (what Kolko calls “Virtual Publics”), and contributors make suggestions for potential policy implications. However, it would have been useful for the reader to have a conclusion at the end of the book, in which Kolko could have recapped and summarized some suggestions for change or made some suggestions for policy initiatives in varying contexts, providing a “where do we go from here” discussion.

What readers take from this collection is how to problematize current Internet studies concerning virtual and physical community and policy initiatives. Ultimately, Kolko does what she intended to do—to deconstruct the present state of research concerning technology and society, to propose the notion of a “virtual public,” and to argue for an interdisciplinary approach to understand the intricate relationship between physicality and virtuality. This collection is useful not only for academics researching the Internet, but also for undergraduate students taking technology courses. The book provides a valuable discussion and comparison between academic disciplines, and it would help students form critical questions in relation to how cultural contexts might influence the way the Internet is incorporated into our daily routines and how it is utilized as a community-building tool.

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