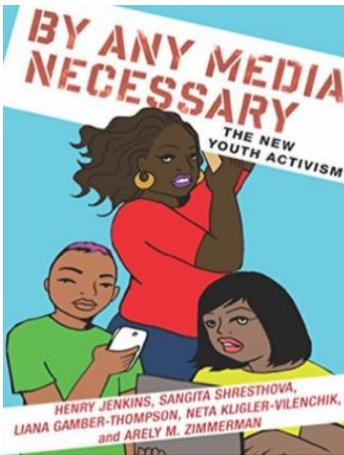


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By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism



Henry Jenkins, Sangita Shresthova, Liana Gamber-Thompson, Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, Arely M. Zimmerman, *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, NYU Press, 2016.

Recent political uprisings taking place in Romania's Victoria's Square make any discussion about digital activism very interesting and intellectually challenging. This is the main reason for bringing into our public's attention a very intriguing book about new type of political participation and engagement. *By*

Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism represents an attempt to grasp the ways the new media are shaping the political space from political participation to political action. The book is written by several researchers Henry Jenkins, Sangita Sheresthova, Liana Gamber-Thomson, Neta Kligler-Vilenchick and Arely M. Zimmerman and it was published in 2016 by New York University Press.

Henry Jenkins (born June 4, 1958) is an American media scholar and a Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts, a joint professorship at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the USC School of Cinematic Arts

Sangita Sheresthova is the author of *Between Storytelling and Surveillance. American Muslim Youth Negotiate Culture, Politics and Participation*. A case Study Report Working Paper, of the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics (YPP) Media, Activism and

Participatory Politics Project (MAPP), Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism University of Southern California September 11, 2013.

Liana Gamber Thompson is a Postdoctoral Research Associate working on the Media Activism and Participatory Politics (MAPP) Project at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at USC. She also facilitates the Civic Paths graduate research group at Annenberg. Her fields of interest include popular culture, identity and authenticity, and gender and feminism. She is currently investigating how youth engagement in participatory cultures, online networks, and new media leads to civic engagement more broadly.

Neta Kligler-Vilenchik is a Ph.D. candidate in Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism at the University of Southern California. As a researcher in the YPP Network, Neta is investigating how youth's involvement in participatory cultures and new media promotes their civic and political engagement. Neta is currently in the writing stages of her Doctoral thesis, which examines case studies of socially-active fan groups as "alternative citizenship models" and considers their broader potential for youth civic engagement.

Arely Zimmerman Assistant Professor/Faculty Fellow of Social and Cultural Analysis holds a Ph.D. from UCLA in political science, with emphasis in political theory and race,

ethnicity, and gender. Her work is situated at the intersection of contemporary political theory, transnational studies, social movements and Latino/a and Latin American studies. Her research agenda revolves around the notion of unauthorized citizenship and the political becoming of undocumented migrants.

The book contains seven chapters that try to emphasize the role of the new media in political engagement as it is today practiced by young people. More than a century ago Marshall McLuhan wrote a phrase that it is been quoted over and over again: "The medium is the message". *By Any Media Necessary* is once again trying to provide a more specific understanding of this claim. What we are witnessing once the social media and especially Facebook became an indispensable tool of production and dissemination of political messages is the incredible shift of the political debate from an austere rational debate to some sort of popular culture infused visual messages. The dramatization of political debate became more and more obvious once the television gained the central role in terms of means of communication. But this was only the first step in an ongoing process strictly related to the way the mass communication means evolved. This is why it is very important to see what the Internet is currently doing to the political messages. What we are now witnessing is the transformation of political messages into vivid memes that quickly attract many viewers. The book insists on a very

interesting phenomenon taking place. Politics, and especially political protests, are based on a new type of language: the visual language with eye – candy popular culture references. Today’s protesters are especially young people speaking this new type of language loaded with popular culture insertions. If we are to think about some of the most creative messages of the 2017 protesters in Romania’s main cities we can see how this is working. Slogans like “No more Victoria’s Secrets” (reference to the fact that the Romanian government is placed in Victoria Square); “Even the Introverts have come out”, or the image of a small dog with a poster on his body saying “I feel like shouting!” (reference to the government criticising the protesters for bringing their pets with them in the square) are vivid examples of this new type of political language. Although it has been criticized for providing poor theoretical perspectives of this new type of political communication the book raises important questions about something it was taken for granted for centuries: *imagination and phantasy have no place in the political debate*. The political debate should be rational and based on empirical evidence not on humour, laughter and cartoons!

But, as the authors of the book are showing this is about to change dramatically. Thus, one of the most important topics of the book is the role of imagination versus the role of rationality in the political debate. The

authors are focusing on young people attempts to produce and disseminate political messages that are the result of a transition from a participatory culture to a participatory politics. The popular culture and the political debates have never been so intertwined. The new media is offering imagination a key role in the political debate. And, as the authors are showing, we should not cast too many doubts on the positive effects of this transformation. This is because without imagination we cannot foresee a better future, a better society. Any political ideal is the result of political imagination. For decades our political leaders used our darker fears to gain legitimacy: they did not promise us a better future, they promised to save us from terrible perils (plagues, terrorism, uncontrolled migration, etc.). Political imagination has also the important role of shifting our attention and aspiration towards a brighter, more positive image of the future. But what is very interesting about this new type of political imagination is that its images are drawn not from *political rhetoric* but from *popular fantasy*! An NGO called “Harry Potter Alliance” that is very popular among young Americans uses Harry Potter references to explain the stakes in human rights. Of course, the same narrative can be used to create panic and fear. Harry Potter references were also used, for example, in Romanian electoral campaign portraying the social democrat leader Liviu Dragnea as the equivalent of

Voldemort. This had a powerful effect on the future protesters in Victoria's square since the electoral video was presenting Voldemort *alias* Dragnea liberating the dark creatures from their cages. The stage was set for the moment where the government was trying to pass an emergency ordinance decriminalizing the abuse of power and other criminal acts.

By Any Media Necessary is a book that takes a descriptive stance trying to present what do young people do to politics, what is the Internet doing to politics. A fair

critique would be that it does not take a more critical stance with regard to the access to this new type of mass communication resource. Media illiteracy and lack of access of some parts of the population should have been closely analysed.

But I consider that any kind of future remarks about the new political language should take into account this book since it is one of the first attempts to grasp the implications of the use of popular culture in the political discourse.

Maria CERNAT

Note

¹ According to Paul Gil, A 'meme' is a virally-transmitted cultural symbol or social idea. The majority of modern memes are captioned photos that are intended to be funny, often as a way to publicly ridicule human behavior. Other memes can be videos and verbal expressions. Some memes have heavier and more philosophical content. The world of memes (which rhymes with 'teams')

is noteworthy for two reasons: *it is a worldwide social phenomenon*, and *memes behave like a mass of infectious flu and cold viruses*, traveling from person to person quickly through social media. (Online document accessed at 01.02.2017) <https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-a-meme-2483702>.