Book Review

Katalin Feher

Generative AI, Media, and Society
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Martina Skrubbeltrang Mahnke[1]

1. Associate Professor, Roskilde University, Institute for Communication and Arts, mahnke@ruc.dk

Generative AI is currently attracting headlines and is an important topic in the field of media and communication studies. As the title sounded promising, I decided to order an inspection copy of the book *Generative AI, Media, and Society* to assess its suitability as a textbook for students at the Master's level. The author, Katalin Feher, is a global AI strategist and researcher in AI Governance, AI Policy, GenAI, Tech Foresight, and Responsible Tech (Feher, n.d.). The back cover furthermore states that this "groundbreaking book demystifies generative AI's transformative impact on media, socio-cultural dynamics, ethics and policy", which raised my interest further. Overall, I believe, it provides a broad and accessible overview of the ongoing debates and related developments. However, as it primarily offers a business- and strategy-oriented perspective, it is less suitable for students in the humanities and social sciences as a stand-alone textbook.

Overall, the book is organized into six chapters: 1) Transformation, 2) Generative AI, 3) AI Media, 4) Uncertainties, 5) Ethics, and 6) Policy. They are preceded by a preface and an introduction. Each chapter follows the same systematic structure: It starts with a definition of the theme, followed by a main body of text, which is divided into subchapters. The concluding part of each chapter includes the description of an impact project, a reflective art section, and closing remarks. Following this, the reader finds a list of discussion questions organized into two categories: scholarly debates and strategic takeaways. These discussion questions are designed to raise debate across the academic fields of cultural, social, and business studies as well as among academics, industry leaders, and policymakers. This stringent structure makes the book predictable and easy to navigate, but it does not allow for the presentation of a coherent argument that flows throughout the whole book.

The opening chapter, Transformation, starts by outlining a short history of technology, followed by subchapters presenting ideas around the technological imperative, datafication, socio-technical systems, and the attention economy. The chapter's final takeaway highlights the book's central pivot point: Emerging technologies create opportunities for growth; however, their societal integration requires interdisciplinary approaches, responsible governance, and alignment with human values. This statement is the baseline that is repeated throughout the book.

The second chapter, Generative AI, deals with the origins of generative AI, general explanations of the mechanics and models, the Turing test, societal and business impacts, as well as the future of generative AI. Generative AI is described as "actively creating original outputs – texts, images, music, voice, video, design, code or models – derived from vast datasets, augmenting traditional AI's predictive and optimization capabilities" (p. 28), which fundamentally redefines human-machine relationships.

Chapter three, AI Media, shifts the focus toward how generative AI intersects with human creativity, especially content creation, distribution, moderation, and personalization. It spans broadly across concepts such as AI media, convergence, robot journalism, immersive media, and disinformation and deepfakes. In the conclusion of the chapter,

human responsibility is brought to the foreground: "We, however, must carefully select research methods involving human participants to avoid over-optimism and bias, ensuring that skepticism and critical thinking are always addressed" (p. 61).

The fourth chapter, Uncertainties, deals with the nature of uncertainties, risks and innovation, business models, societal and environmental sustainability, as well as emotional intelligence and societal future(s). It urges the reader to dig deeper into popular societal narratives and expectations surrounding AI.

Chapter five, Ethics, outlines the profound ethical challenges related to generative AI use and discusses the harms of misuse, bias, and colonization as well as responsible and explainable generative AI.

The final and sixth chapter, Policy, engages in topics such as human-centered design, equity and human rights, AI power dynamics, contrasting strategies, the human labor market, and AI for good. As a conclusion, the author advocates for a "dynamic governance approach, emphasizing the necessity of strategic foresight – that is, methods that predict future challenges and risks" (p. 123).

The book is an ambitious project, and its strength lies in its ability to present diverse topics in a clear and accessible manner. It covers a wide array of areas related to generative AI and provides a panoramic overview of the key terms, concepts, and ongoing debates. For readers new to the topic of generative AI or wishing to receive a quick overview of key discussions, the systematic chapter design makes the book easy to use, especially as a quick reference point. The inclusion of a lengthy glossary further shows that the book can be utilized as an ongoing resource. Another strength is its attempt to appeal to multiple audiences at once. By framing scholarly debates alongside business and policy implications, the book reflects the reality that generative AI is not confined to academic discourse but is a phenomenon actively shaping contemporary societies.

At the same time, the ambition to create a book for a wide audience comes at a certain cost. The wide range of topics introduced often results in a rather descriptive engagement with the individual themes. For instance, on page 26, the book talks about a social filter bubble without referencing or discussing the substantial critical literature that has debated and often challenged its empirical validity (see, amongst others, Bruns, 2019). Similarly, the definition of uncertainties presented in the fourth chapter does not appear substantial. Uncertainties are defined as "unpredictable outcomes of integrating these emerging technologies into societies" (p. 64). This definition, while straightforward, seems underdeveloped, especially with regard to the discussed socio-environmental implications, which are neither new nor unpredictable. The chapter promises to explore root causes, yet the discussion remains cursory and descriptive, at the level of more general knowledge rather than providing a deeper analysis.

Reviewing the book from a social science and humanities perspective, it lacks depth in addressing the power relations, epistemic assumptions, as well as the political economies constituting generative AI. It leans towards a business-oriented stance, where the possibil-

ity of growth is foregrounded while alternative framings – such as the outright rejection of AI technologies – are not explored. While this might not be the scope of the book, it still leaves the reader with the question: What about exploring *not* using AI? Are other, alternative futures, conceivable?

The use of references creates a further tension for readers. While the writing style is generally authoritative and convincing, from an academic perspective, the equal treatment of blog posts and academic literature side by side without much differentiation seems rather questionable. While some sources have undergone rigorous peer review, others have been developed in different processes with different audiences in mind. In general, the use of various resources is refreshing, a clearer differentiation of the nature of the sources would have enhanced transparency when reading the book.

Overall, *Generative AI, Media, and Society* is an ambitious and accessible book that aims to demystify generative AI and its societal integration. Its systematic structure, extensive glossary, and discussion questions make it an appealing entry point for non-specialist readers, business practitioners, and policymakers. It offers inspiration and can serve as a springboard for discussion. However, despite its accessibility, the strategic and business-oriented framing makes it less suitable as the backbone of a critical media and communication studies curriculum. Yet, for academics, it could serve as a supplementary resource, especially for those interested in mapping the breadth of contemporary debates and situating themselves in relation to both academic and non-academic discourses on generative AI.

References

Bruns, A. (2019). *Are filter bubbles real?* John Wiley & Sons.

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