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Book review of: newmedia.com.au

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Trevor Barr. *newmedia.com.au* Allen & Unwin: Australia, 2000.

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Trevor Barr's latest book *newmedia.com.au* is a thorough and decisive examination of where Australia's media and communications industry is today and how it has been influenced by government, private, and public agendas. The book points to the significant growth of the "information society" and the impact media convergence has had on individuals, social-economic groups, and institutions. The boundaries between media, telecommunications and computing are no longer distinct. However, until now, there have been few comprehensive and critical books which have addressed national strategic issues and integrated policies in the way Barr's book does.

Barr utilises a combination of in-depth historical resources and contemporary data to map out the issues concerning media convergence. His central claim is: "no longer should communications be merely examined as an industry, but rather as a phenomenon which has now infiltrated virtually every aspect of our lives and which affects how society is organised" (iix). He begins by analysing the rise and expansion of the private media sector and the sphere of influence which Rupert Murdoch, Kerry Packer, and John Fairfax and their predecessors have built over the last 170 years. He then covers the sale of telecommunications company Telstra, while highlighting the often laggard regulatory roles with which governments have approached international telecommunications strategies. The book then analyses issues of Internet governance (censorship and privacy) and the growth of cyber culture. The "paradoxes" of being human in the digital era are apparent throughout the book's exploration of the issues surrounding equity, access, and the need for stronger public services amidst the capitalistic and deterministic agendas driving technological change. "Half of the world's population has no access to a telephone, and a third must travel two hours a day if they wish to use a telephone" (147). Barr's important research reminds us that billions of people are *not* connected; we are *not* all equally part of the so-called information

society.

Perhaps the book's most valuable contribution is its advocacy for greater public debate ("discourses for development") and increased political attention ("politics, not policies") surrounding the potential benefits of an "advanced information society". Barr states that "we urgently need to come to terms with the links between globalisation and its interdependence with information technologies, the structural changes occurring within modern contemporary economies, and the centrality of new communications processes to economic prosperity and social well-being" (210). The book offers a strategic and forward thinking model by constructing a cogent ten step "blueprint" for Australian communications policies. This innovative blueprint for change calls for a shift in the balance of power relations needed to truly build a stronger public service with greater equity and access. Barr's model advocates increased competition, long-term communication strategies, and a balanced approach to media regulation which fosters content innovation and cultural development.

newmedia.com.au ultimately encourages the reader to contemplate the ethical issues and the "trade-offs" individuals, businesses, and institutions face in the pursuit of a corporatised and mogul-centric "on-line society". Both academic and general readers will find the book's depth and scope thought provoking as it critically addresses the multifarious nature of new media, the impact globalisation has had on Australia's media landscape, and the future function of traditional and new media in local and global environments.

[Brian Yecies](#)

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