

## Book Review

McNutt, J. G. (Ed.). (2018). *Technology, activism, and social justice in a digital age*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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McNutt, professor of public policy and administration at the University of Delaware, has edited the work of 21 academics and practitioners in social work, public administration, journalism, law, philanthropy, urban affairs, planning, and education. The resulting 14 chapters, grouped into five uneven sections, introduce the use of technology in the creation of social change. It does not seek to help readers master the technology but to understand social media, civic technology, leaderless organizations, open data, political technology, and data science in contrast to traditional lobbying and organizing. All authors are committed to a fair and just future—McNutt's description of social justice. The first section and chapter is a brief overview.

The second section provides a three-chapter introduction to advocacy that could be quite profitably used, even in an undergraduate course. The first includes a comprehensive list of advocacy techniques on a continuum from traditional mechanisms (inside lobbying and high value fundraising) to the use of technology alone (e-petitions and virtual campaigning). The next chapter argues that advocacy is a moral imperative and explains in some detail the rules regarding lobbying for nonprofit organizations. An advocacy model is introduced in an attempt to stimulate more nonprofit lobbying. The last chapter in this section discusses how human service organizations might effectively modify government contracts by collaborating to improve delivery of services rather than competing for contracts.

The next section contains three chapters that include a case study, an argument for Twitter use, and a theoretical consideration of the relationship between nonprofits and governments. The case study explores how traditional social action and digital techniques were effectively merged by Newark residents opposed to the construction of a new power plant. Findings from this study suggest that digital technology reduced the need for fiscal resources. Online communications were the dominant entry point for those who joined the protest, and membership was more likely through technology. Higher transaction-cost activities (e.g., protest events and canvassing) were more likely to produce funding and develop leadership.

The chapter on the use of Twitter considers it an excellent means of bypassing traditional media and rapidly organizing collective action, but warns that the questionable accuracy of user-generated content and the increase in online bullying are potentially disadvantageous. The chapter ends by suggesting that advocates use Twitter pseudonymously, an indication of the potential damage Twitter use might cause to a professional's public reputation. The final chapter describes civic technology as the use of the new communication technologies for service provision, civic engagement, and data analysis. It raises significant questions about the theoretical relationship of nonprofits to government without providing any answers to the questions raised, and ends with the prediction that brick and mortar nonprofits may eventually yield to virtual voluntary organizations, especially as membership

organizations continue to decline in preference to online engagement.

The fourth section is described as the policy section, but it contains six chapters that are quite disparate and detailed. Each is essentially a short research report addressing an issue that is more likely to be relevant to specialists than to a general audience. The first chapter describes a case study of the successful online protest that stopped the Stop Online Privacy/Protect Intellectual Property Act in 2012. The key lesson is that political entrepreneurs may no longer be necessary in order to defeat entrenched interests, but this case did require the shared interests of the entire tech community to defeat Hollywood. The next chapter is a content analysis of 732 community action agencies' digital presence that concluded that there is some correlation between agency size and a social media presence, but that there is little evidence of policy advocacy among this sample. The next chapter reports the findings of a survey of state-level child welfare advocacy agencies (N = 47, response rate of 69%). The findings were that use of fax is declining, email remains useful and strong, and Facebook is the dominant social media platform.

The next chapter describes the use of social media in China. There, social media is heavily regulated, but tolerated as it represents grassroots disclosure of bureaucratic overreach. Another chapter described how information technology might be used in policing ocean traffic to improve compliance with international regulations, and the last is on leaderless social movements (e.g., Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street, and the Arab Spring), and how the distributed leadership is shared, interactive, reciprocal, contextualized, and self-aware. The authors believe that such movements de-professionalize advocacy efforts in favor of grassroots participation without acknowledging the substantial financial backing by elites that the Tea Party received.

The final section's chapter argues that the future will turn away from funder-dominated traditional advocacy organizations to virtual organizations

operating through voluntary associations, that the future will make greater use of data in advocacy practice despite the risks to privacy and surveillance concerns, and that online educational platforms to train advocates will be used in more relevant and accessible ways. These trends are interpreted to lead toward an increase in evidence-based practice in advocacy. Such broad conclusions require an evidentiary base far beyond that provided in this volume and seem incompatible with the traditional influence over policy by moneyed interests and the absence of evidence that the new technologies are somehow more likely than traditional media to bridge the practitioner-researcher divide without distortion.

The first half of this book is a brief but very useful introduction to online advocacy, but it may downplay the potential online technology possesses to distort media narratives and distract from important news as it happens. Based on a single mention of President Trump in the chapter on Twitter use, it is clear that the cutting-edge nature of this content is not fully informed by the two years of Twitter misuse by the Trump administration. I suspect that McNutt would have included a chapter regarding the ethical use of online media if this book was being developed today. Nonetheless, social work educators seeking a contemporary understanding of advocacy in the Internet age are encouraged to review this text for possible use. I believe that today's students might find this a well-conceived overview of the changing world of advocacy and activism.