

Shaping the Digital World: Key Reads on Influence, Power, and AI

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As the digital world continues to evolve, so do expert conversations about the present moment and theories about its future. This book roundup shares some of the most compelling works published in the past year across five key themes: *influence and influencers, power and governance; AI ethics and impacts; psychology, susceptibility, and trust; and activism, sovereignty, and rethinking the digital future*. Who are the figures that wield narrative influence in today's information ecosystem? What policies and power struggles have defined the digital age, and who gets to make decisions about the use of AI? How are global systems being challenged, resisted, and remade online? These works – produced by scholars and tech industry insiders – examine cases from the “algorithmic agency” of gig workers (*Algorithms of Resistance*) and the democratic design of emerging technologies (*AI Needs You, Governable Spaces*) to online propaganda networks (*Invisible Rulers*) and ideological shifts in Silicon Valley (*Gaming Democracy, The Tech Coup*), with actionable insights for individuals, civil society, and policymakers alike.

This roundup also gives a preview of what to read in 2025 – an overview of what's been published this year so far, as well as the titles with confirmed publication dates in the months to come.

Influence and Influencers

Understanding today's digital environment isn't just about what information gets spread, but who gets to spread it. These works examine the figures that wield narrative power, from family members and science communicators to political pundits and foreign actors – the stories they tell, their sources of influence, and how they build (or undermine) trust in the world around us.

[**Science v. Story: Narrative Strategies for Science Communicators**](#)

Emma Frances Bloomfield

University of California Press (February 2024)

A novel solution to the challenges of misinformation, *Science v. Story* makes the case for storytelling as a necessary tool for science communicators. Bloomfield examines false narratives around issues of climate change, evolution, vaccination, and COVID-19; why those narratives stick; and how they can be countered through “rival stories,” which engage with audiences on an emotional level while upholding scientific conclusions. *Science v. Story* directs itself towards practical applications with a breakdown of the components of effective storytelling.

[Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies into Reality](#)

Renée DiResta

Hachette Book Group (June 2024)

In *Invisible Rulers*, Renée DiResta investigates how a niche set of anti-system influencers have increasingly shaped public opinion, spreading propaganda to undermine the legitimacy of government and scientific institutions, with dangerous consequences. DiResta identifies the parts of the current digital information ecosystem that have enabled their rise, and offers solutions for leaders to regain control of the narrative.

[Through the Grapevine: Socially Transmitted Information and Distorted Democracy](#)

Taylor N. Carlson

University of Chicago Press (July 2024)

Through the Grapevine examines what it means when Americans rely on family and friends – rather than traditional news media – to stay on top of current events, and how the conversational spread of misinformation from within trusted networks can contribute to a public that is “at once underinformed, polarized, and engaged.”

[The Disinformers: Social Media, Disinformation, and Elections](#)

Lance Porter (Editor)

LSU Press (August 2024)

The Disinformers is an anatomy of how foreign state-sponsored disinformation campaigns have destabilized U.S. political conversations since 2016, enabled by inaction from social platforms. An edited volume of research with contributions from political scientists, media scholars, computer scientists, and cybersecurity experts, *The Disinformers* explores the targeted spread of incendiary content designed to erode our trust in each other and in

democratic institutions, its impacts on youth and marginalized voters, why fake posts go viral, and its implications for the future of election security.

[Climate Propagandas: Stories of Extinction and Regeneration](#)

Jonas Staal

The MIT Press (September 2024)

In *Climate Propagandas*, Jonas Staal untangles the propaganda narratives that shape public understanding of the climate crisis and how those stories are reproduced across popular culture and the internet. Staal emphasizes stories of climate repair and regeneration as a means to counter existing propaganda and bridge some of the deeply-entrenched ideological conflicts that have prevented climate action.

[Gaming Democracy: How Silicon Valley Leveled Up the Far Right](#)

Adrienne L. Massanari

MIT Press (October 2024)

Gaming Democracy traces how far right political movements learned to “game” digital algorithms and content moderation policies, which prioritized an absolutist version of free speech above all else. Massanari asserts that - while these movements are not new - the strategies they use *are*, as memes and other digital tools give rise to phenomena like QAnon and COVID denialism.

Power and Governance in the Digital Age

What decisions, past and present, shape our online communication? These works trace the key moments, policies, and power struggles that have defined the digital age, from the history of internet governance to the state of privacy rights and platform accountability - all with an emphasis on the stakes for citizens and policymakers alike.

[Taking Privacy Seriously: How to Create the Rights We Need While We Still Have Something to Protect](#)

James B. Rule

University of California Press (April 2024)

In *Taking Privacy Seriously*, James Rule provides a step-by-step roadmap for restoring and

protecting individual rights over personal data, building on an analysis of the privacy-eroding practices that brought us here. *Taking Privacy Seriously* outlines eleven reforms, from transparency initiatives to universal property rights over data.

[Forks in the Digital Road: Key Decisions in the History of the Internet](#)

Scott J. Shackelford and Scott O. Bradner

Oxford University Press (May 2024)

Forks in the Road is an account of key decision points in the history of cybersecurity and Internet governance, with an emphasis on alternatives (the titular “forks in the road”) that existed at the time. By engaging what could have been, Shackelford and Bradner suggest what *could* be, building on the past to offer practical solutions for the future of online communication.

[The Politics of Platform Regulation: How Governments Shape Online Content Moderation](#)

Robert Gorwa

Oxford University Press (August 2024)

The Politics of Platform Regulation explores the how, why, and where governments seek to regulate digital platforms and the moderation of harmful content. Gorwa views platform regulation as a form of transnational politics – answerable to the traditional social, cultural, and political pressures that drive policy action – offering rich analysis of actual episodes of platform regulation around the world, including in response to crisis events like the 2021 U.S. Capitol Insurrection and the 2019 Christchurch shooting.

[The Tech Coup: How to Save Democracy from Silicon Valley](#)

Marietje Schaake

Princeton University Press (September 2024)

In what has become especially relevant since its publication, *The Tech Coup* examines how tech companies have spent decades resisting regulation under the promise of innovation, and instead became a force for digital authoritarianism. Building on her experience in the European Parliament and Silicon Valley, Schaake outlines actionable solutions for policymakers and citizens alike to seize back control and instill hope for a healthier, more democratic digital future.

AI Ethics & Impacts

Artificial intelligence continued to demand expert attention in the past year. As AI and other emerging technologies become increasingly prevalent in daily life, these works explore the spectrum of their potential benefits, real risks, and who gets to decide AI's future.

[AI Snake Oil: What Artificial Intelligence Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell the Difference](#)

Arvind Narayanan and Sayash Kapoor

Princeton University Press (September 2024)

AI Snake Oil offers a practical roadmap to AI, cutting through rampant - and often empty - grand claims, with an insider view of its actual capabilities, harms, and (mis)applications in areas like education, medicine, criminal justice, and social media. Computer scientists Arvind Narayanan and Sayash Kapoor make the case that "we should be far more worried about what people will do with AI than about anything AI will do on its own," with a call for greater accountability for large tech companies.

[The Cybernetic Border: Drones, Technology, and Intrusion](#)

Iván Char López

Duke University Press (March 2024)

While we often think of technology as transcending or challenging physical borders, *The Cybernetic Border* is a case study in their reinforcement. Char Lopez draws on a wealth of archival data to trace the history of the U.S. government's use of border control technologies - including drones, smart walls, artificial intelligence, and biometric technologies, and other data networks - along the U.S.-Mexico border, creating the idea of a racialized enemy to further develop surveillance data networks.

[AI Needs You: How We Can Change AI's Future and Save Our Own](#)

Verity Harding

Princeton University Press (March 2024)

AI Needs You is a pragmatic call-to-action for its readers: as artificial intelligence continues to permeate daily life and communication, it should not be the sole domain of those who build it. Everyone can (and must) take an active role in shaping its future. Drawing on

twentieth-century innovations like the internet, the space race, and IVF, industry insider Verity Harding encourages readers to remember that emerging technologies can work towards a democratic, responsible, trust-building public good – so long as we demand conversations to develop it as such.

Psychology, Susceptibility, and Trust

One of the most prominent themes in research and conversations on (mis)information spread over the last few years has been its cognitive, algorithmic, and psychological drivers. The below works offer both a state-of-the-field and innovative insights, with analyses of digital memory-making, practical solutions for media literacy training, and individual- and community-level interventions to rebuild trust.

[Falsehoods Fly: Why Misinformation Spreads and How to Stop It](#)

Paul Thagard

Columbia University Press (February 2024)

Grounded in cognitive science and philosophy, *Falsehoods Fly* argues that countering false claims must begin with an understanding of how we generate information in the first place – according to Thagard’s AIMS theory, through four distinct processes, including acquisition, inference, memory, and spread. Misinformation occurs when those processes break down. Thagard outlines practical solutions to restore accurate information at those key intervention points, with an analysis of the dangers of misinformation on COVID-19, climate change, inequality, and global conflict.

[The Rise of the Algorithms: How YouTube and TikTok Conquered the World](#)

John M. Jordan

Penn State University Press (March 2024)

The Rise of the Algorithms explores the origins and evolution of online video platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Twitch, and the significant impacts of their algorithm-driven content delivery on privacy, behavior, mental health, disinformation, and trust in public institutions. Jordan offers insight into cross-platform information ecosystems, as well as recommendations for the future of our online world.

[May Contain Lies: How Stories, Statistics and Studies Exploit Our Biases - And What We Can Do About It](#)

Alex Edmans

April 2024 (University of California Press)

May Contain Lies takes aim at the willful distortion of statistics used to support false claims. Edmans develops a practical guide for sharper, more critical thinking in the current information environment, breaking down the psychological biases that cause us to misinterpret information; how to distinguish between facts, statements, data, evidence, and proof; and how to go beyond individual sources to learn scientific consensus and assess sources of information.

[The Psychology of Misinformation](#)

Jon Roozenbeek, Sander van der Linden (Editors)

Cambridge University Press (March 2024)

The Psychology of Misinformation is an aptly-named state of the field, offering a comprehensive overview into current psychological understandings of misinformation. Roozenbeek and van der Linden explore key concepts; its history and current dynamics; why people believe and share misinformation; how much blame can be placed on echo chambers and filter bubbles; and various measures being used to counter misinformation, from laws and regulation to individual-level interventions like fact-checking, content labeling, pre/debunking, and more.

[The Remaking of Memory in the Age of the Internet and Social Media](#)

Qi Wang and Andrew Hoskins (Editors)

Oxford University Press (November 2024)

A collection of research from neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, and media and communication studies, *The Remaking of Memory* examines how digital communication has challenged the building blocks of human memory - in both a cognitive *and* a cultural sense. Editors Qi Wang and Andrew Hoskins bring together analyses of the ways in which technology has changed the way we process and store information, how current and historical events get (mis)remembered online, and how the lines between individual, community, and societal memory have been blurred.

[The Anatomy of Deception: Conspiracy Theories, Distrust, and Public Health in America](#)

Sara E. Gorman

December 2024 (Oxford University Press)

The Anatomy of Deception traces the roots of the current crisis of medical misinformation, health-related conspiracy theories, and widespread mistrust in the U.S. healthcare system over the last five years. Drawing on in-depth interviews and case studies, Sara Gorman asserts that the cause is neither purely structural, nor psychological – rather, a lack of access and a lack of trust feed into each other. Gorman also convincingly frames healthcare as a fundamental democratic right; as such, the failure of the U.S. healthcare system has led to increased disillusionment, eroded trust in democratic institutions, and support for authoritarian ideologies. *The Anatomy of Deception* is a timely call to reexamine medical and political trust interconnected issues, with suggested pathways to rebuild healthcare systems and strengthen democratic values.

Activism, Sovereignty, and Reimagining the Digital Future

The status quo isn't set in stone. These works challenge the power dynamics of today's digital environment in all their forms – building on analyses of Black online activism, worker resistance and algorithmic agency, and pushes for tech sovereignty in the Global South, each set of authors reimagines online community and offers a glimpse into a more equitable and participatory digital future.

[Black Networked Resistance: Strategic Rearticulations in the Digital Age](#)

Raven Simone Maragh-Lloyd

University of California Press (January 2024)

Black Networked Resistance explores how Black digital users combine creativity and strategic resistance in everyday online spaces. Maragh-Lloyd draws on a rich array of interviews and historically-grounded case studies to analyze humor, archiving, or care and mutual aid as vehicles of social and political change – and pathways to imagine “a future of joy, community, and agency” in the digital age.

[Algorithms of Resistance: The Everyday Fight against Platform Power](#)

Tiziano Bonini and Emiliano Treré

MIT Press (February 2024)

If datafication is inevitable, Bonini and Treré write, then so is user-driven resistance against

it. *Algorithms of Resistance* draws on the experiences of gig workers, artists, and political activists across the Global North and South to examine the ways in which people take the algorithms that infiltrate daily life and repurpose them to their advantage - a phenomenon the authors refer to as “algorithmic agency.” Beyond a theoretical critique, Bonini and Treré make the case that “the fight is still on” by highlighting the real, actionable ways to resist platform power.

[Governable Spaces: Democratic Design for Online Life](#)

Nathan Schneider (Author), Darija Medic (Illustrator)

University of California Press (February 2024)

Governable Spaces sees missed potential in digital spaces. Where users have been conditioned to accept platforms and moderators as all-powerful (“implicit feudalism”), Schneider makes the case for what *could* be, and how to achieve it: online communities as sites of “creative, radical, and democratic renaissance.”

[Popular Sovereignty in a Digital Age: Lessons for the Global South and Working Classes](#)

Aaron Schneider (Editor)

SUNY Press (August 2024)

Popular Sovereignty in a Digital Age views the present moment as a “fourth industrial revolution,” a once-in-a-century technological leap that fundamentally alters the dynamics of the international system. With contributions from a diverse range of scholars, this volume explores the challenges posed by the rising power of big tech companies - especially for working classes and the Global South - and the window of opportunity to establish a more democratic, socially inclusive, and ecologically sustainable digital age.

What to Read in 2025

A slate of innovative research awaits, covering themes across the metaverse, online extremism, encrypted digital underworlds, the legacy of Black Twitter, and much more. The following titles - published in the first quarter of 2025, or with confirmed publication dates in the months to come - offer insight into what experts are talking about and how we might expect conversations on our digital world to evolve.

Note: Exact publication dates for unreleased titles are subject to change.

[We Tried to Tell Y'All: Black Twitter and the Rise of Digital Counternarratives](#)

Meredith D. Clark

Oxford University Press (January 2025)

We Tried to Tell Y'All explores the emergence and importance of Black Twitter - not as a digital divide, Clark argues, but the continuation of a long history of the Black press and a necessary alternative to the erasure and mischaracterization of Black communities in the mainstream news media.

[CTRL Hate Delete: The New Anti Feminist Backlash and How We Fight Back](#)

Cécile Simmons

Policy Press (February 2025)

CTRL Hate Delete offers insight into the rising tide of online misogyny in the years since #MeToo, tracing the mainstreaming of extreme male supremacist beliefs - from the "manosphere" to "tradwife" content - with strategies to remake the digital sphere more equal and inclusive, based on interviews with experts, influencers, and activists.

[Safe Havens for Hate: The Challenge of Moderating Online Extremism](#)

Tamar Mitts

Princeton University Press (March 2025)

In *Safe Havens for Hate*, Tamar Mitts analyzes the cross-platform activities of extremist and hate organizations around the world like the Islamic State, the Oath Keepers, and the Proud Boys, untangling how platform-specific social media content moderation strategies have failed to stop the spread of harmful posts. Efforts to combat online extremism need to go beyond any single group or platform, but consider the digital information environment as a whole.

[The Influencer Industry: The Quest for Authenticity on Social Media](#)

Emily Hund

Princeton University Press (March 2025)

In *The Influencer Industry*, Emily Hund examines the way that digital content creators have reshaped the flow of trust and information online - and how the "authentic" individuals

often seen as an exception to a fractured, profit-driven communication environment are directly embedded within it.

[The Metaverse: What Everyone Needs to Know](#)

Scott Shackelford, Michael Mattioli, Jeffrey Prince, and João Marinotti

Oxford University Press (April 2025)

Part of OUP's *What Everyone Needs to Know* series, this timely explainer breaks down what the Metaverse is, how it operates, and what it means for people, business, and the future of online communication.

[Open Secrecy: How Technology Empowers the Digital Underworld](#)

Isak Ladegaard

University of California Press (May 2025)

Open Secrecy peers into the ways in which the global digital underground thrives on an “ominous mix” of tools like military-grade encryption, rerouting software, and cryptocurrencies, enabling anonymous collective action that evades state or platform control.

[Raising AI: An Essential Guide to Parenting Our Future](#)

De Kai

MIT University Press (June 2025)

Written for general audiences by a longtime industry insider, *Raising AI* explores the ways that careful, ethical, and responsible use of artificial intelligence can contribute to a more humane and compassionate future.

[Digital Culture Shock: Who Creates Technology and Why This Matters](#)

Katharina Reinecke

Princeton University Press (August 2025)

Digital Culture Shock explores how technology is inherently a product of the culture that makes it, and how those built-in assumptions can lead to failure, misunderstandings, and a loss of trust when exported outside that culture.