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Kathryn C. Montgomery, **Generation Digital: Politics, Commerce, and Childhood in the Age of the Internet**, The MIT Press, 2007, 368 pp., $19.77 (hardcover).

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Digital media culture is an integral part of youth's everyday life in the information age. For them, the new digital media sub-culture is an electronic playground, a medium of education and an arena for social development. However, new media also has its drawbacks and risks. The Internet, for example, contains sexually explicit material, violent websites and deceptive human relationships which are all inappropriate for children. The Internet has also become a marketplace where companies collect and mine personal data. Subsequently, the same information is often used to target children and other users with tailored marketing campaigns.

Kathryn C. Montgomery, drawing on her background as a professor as well as a media rights advocate and mother, tackles these issues clearly and dispassionately in her book *Generation Digital: Politics, Commerce, and Childhood in the Age of the Internet.* Montgomery's main thesis in the book is that digital media leads to ever more subtle forms of commercialization. It is the Internet that especially shapes new ways of marketing and of being marketed in the era of digital media. Furthermore, Montgomery underscores that children are at the heart of this change. This is because children are one of the most promising, but also one of the most vulnerable consumer groups. Yet, there seems to be a more profound concern over the future of children at the core of the book. The book addresses an explicit question: Who should look after children in the information age — parents, media industry, or the government?

Montgomery's book brings children to the fore when it comes to the development of digital media and media rights in the U.S. The book covers a period from the 1990s' technology boom to the present via the burst of the dot-com bubble. It is constructed in eight chapters with an extensive collection of end notes which make up nearly a third of the study, making the book well-documented, tough, not rich in theoretical content. Nevertheless, the end notes anchor the study firmly and uniquely to public and political debates on children's media rights. It is Montgomery's position as an insider of American media politics that has made this possible. She is a co-founder and leader of the Center for Media Education that played a crucial role in the 1990s media-policy battles in the United States.

My reading of *Generation Digital* is that it addresses three major topics. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 deal with a political battle for *privacy and content control* in the age of digital media. This part of the book shows how the Clinton administration aspired to stick to industry-based self-regulation despite towering pressure from the European Union to strengthen governmental privacy control. Chapters 5 and 6 move the focus of the book from privacy rights and content control toward *marketing* in digital media. This part illustrates how new electronic marketing tools are woven into the fabric of the Internet in ways which make marketing research and advertising almost unrecognizable. Lastly, Chapter 7 evaluates the potential of the Internet as a medium of *civic involvement.* By taking Robert Putnam's concern about a decline in

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civic activity seriously, Montgomery ponders if new digital media could revitalize political participation among young people.

To begin with the first topic of *privacy and content control*, Montgomery argues that the need for protecting children's *privacy* in digital media can be related to labor market transformations in the 1960-1990s. As the share of dual-income families increased dramatically in the U.S., parents started to face a severe lack of time to look after their children. For the media industry, this was a great marketing niche. Children become a new market segment with a rising amount of decision-making power in family purchases. Consequently, specific marketing campaigns and television programming, such as Nickelodeon, targeted children, were considered problematic in terms of youth's privacy.

Montgomery elucidates the drawbacks of this development by analyzing political debates on the necessity of content control in television broadcasting. She uses dozens of pages to iron out a political process that aims toward the introduction of the V-chip. (The V-chip is a technological feature of television receivers that allows the blocking of programs based on a rating system that combines content-based and age-based information.) Montgomery writes, "The V-chip was perfectly suited to the politics of the digital era. It was a new tool for overworked, stressed-out parents who did not have time to monitor or control every minute of their children's viewing" (p. 47).

In the 1990s, the Internet revealed similar privacy and content problems as television broadcasting years earlier. The hunt for a technological solution analogous to V-chip had begun. Montgomery writes that "The official position of the Clinton Administration was that the Internet privacy, like the rest of e-commerce, should not be governed by laws but industry self-regulations" (p. 79). This led to the development of technological parenting tools, such as NetNanny, CyberPatrol, CyberSitter and SafeSurf, which all aimed at blocking websites inappropriate for children. However, it quickly turned out that none of this software was perfect and tech savvy children learned to circumvent the blocking without much effort. What is ironic is that this type of software was invented to relieve parents' concerns over their children viewing of inappropriate material but in practice they added to parents' caring responsibilities. Now parents were also responsible to supervise whether their children used these applications or not.

The Clinton Administration took a step toward governmental regulation when the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) took effect in 2000. The act was promoted as a "parental empowerment tool," though it also posed a new task for parents with children. As Montgomery writes, parents "were now expected to read carefully the privacy policies on children's websites before agreeing to let children participate" (p. 103). Together with the above-presented parenting tools, COPPA indicated a small but significant power shift in privacy control between the state, media industry and parents. In contrast to the industry-based self-regulation policy, parents were now obligated to take greater responsibility for their children's online behavior. Montgomery does not elaborate this issue in great detail, even if it appears significant in terms of division of responsibilities in the information age.

The second thematical part of the book deals with ways how digital *marketing* practices blend with users identities. Montgomery's main contribution at this point is her analysis of commodifying identity. The phenomenon is theoretically most interesting and would have deserved more contemplation. Montgomery presents that human identity is commercialized on the Internet. Marketers regularly monitor chat rooms, bulletin boards and discussion groups, where children and teenagers express their consuming habits and points of interests. Personal information and consuming habits are also registered through various online surveys and then utilized in niche marketing. Still, Montgomery considers that such surveys and questionnaires have a dual function. They are both a valuable source of marketing information and a new form of youth's identity exploration. This is to note that it would be rather black-and-white to judge online marketing solely as an evil of the information age.

Montgomery formulates that, "Market research became such an integral part of the online teen culture that it not only shaped the content, on many cases *it was* the content" (p. 177). Market research is integrated almost seamlessly with the Internet, which in turn is a natural part of youth's everyday life today. "Advergaming" is a great example of this symbiotic relationship between marketing and the Internet. As video and online games are an effective way of targeting younger people, in particular, advertisements are increasingly built into the games. Montgomery's book illustrates the great potential of the Internet for tailored marketing. By the same token, the book makes it clear that it is possible only because people invest so much of their identity and personality in the Internet.

The third major theme of the book tackles *civic involvement* among young people. The "Peer-to-Peer Politics" chapter presents various strategies and efforts made to harness the Internet to promote political involvement in the U.S. According to Montgomery, it was the disappointing youth turnout of the 2000 presidential elections that set things in motion, including numerous web-based initiatives, such as Rock the Vote, Meetup.com and MoveOn, to activate young voters. Even if the significance of websites for voting rates is difficult to define, the overall voter turnout among 18-24 year-olds increased considerably in the 2004 elections and reached its highest level in more than a decade (p. 201). Montgomery's analysis reinforces the understanding of the potential of the Internet to mobilize people.

Civic disobedience, the other side of civic involvement, is also treated in the book. Montgomery approaches it through "free culture movement" that aimed at returning the commercialized Internet to the ordinary citizens. Montgomery writes, "As digital media became increasingly personalized, many young people maintained a strong sense of intimacy and ownership in their relationship to new technologies" (p. 202). The commercialization of the Internet took one step further when the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) was introduced in 2000. The act was designed to protect copyrights of digital material that is easy to download and distribute over the Internet. The Internet activist groups invented a range of ways to defend against the proceeding commercialization of the Internet. One of their tactics was to build "stunt" pages mimicking the style and parodying the content of original web pages. In her book, Montgomery presents many illustrative examples on free culture movement, including Downhillbattle.org and Crappy Present websites.

Finally, we come back to the question about who should look after children in the age of digital media: parents, media industry, or government? Kathryn C. Montgomery's book does not give an explicit answer to this question, though it pinpoints certain shifts in emphasis. In the U.S., the pure industry-based self-regulation of the contents of new media and the industry-based control of privacy rights turned out to be an unsustainable solution. The government has gradually taken a bigger role in these issues. Yet, the government considers new regulatory acts, such as COPPA, rather as ways to provide parents with new empowerment tools than ways to strengthen governmental control. Montgomery's book lets us understand that as an outcome of this, it is the overworked American parents whose role in shepherding their children has risen.

If something could be added to the book, it would be the voice of the parents. Children are economically, emotionally and socially dependent on grown-ups in the era of digital media. Yet, it is not clear whether parents are able to control their tech-savvy children in the use of new media. Therefore, some parental viewpoints on privacy problems and the harmful effects of digital media would have been an interesting adjunct to the study. However, the role of human actors is not in the core of the book which is very consistent and creditable in its media politics approach.

Kathryn C. Montgomery's book is an eye-opening study for those whose conceptions of media and childhood are bounded to the physical reality with tangible boundaries. The Internet calls for the redefinition of both concepts. The book can be recommended to those interested in the intermingling of the Internet with the human identity, privacy rights and civic activity in the age of digital media. The book is written from the perspective of media studies and politics, though it provides both sociologists and political scientists with food for thought. The book may also be read as an account of how privacy as a social right is tried to be secured in one of the world's leading information societies.