

## SOCIAL MEDIA

### A Critical Introduction

Christian Fuchs *University of Westminster*

That rarest of academic creations: a truly, unabashedly critical textbook on a timely and important topic for contemporary media studies. If you want your students to think about issues of power and social justice, if you want to challenge them to re-imagine the world, and if you want an alternative to the anodyne and borderline fan-like writing that has become the stuff of new media texts, this is the book for you

- Mark Andrejevic, *University of Queensland*

Now, more than ever, we need to understand social media - the good as well as the bad. We need critical knowledge that helps us to navigate the controversies and contradictions of this complex digital media landscape. Only then can we make informed judgements about what is happening in our media world, and why.

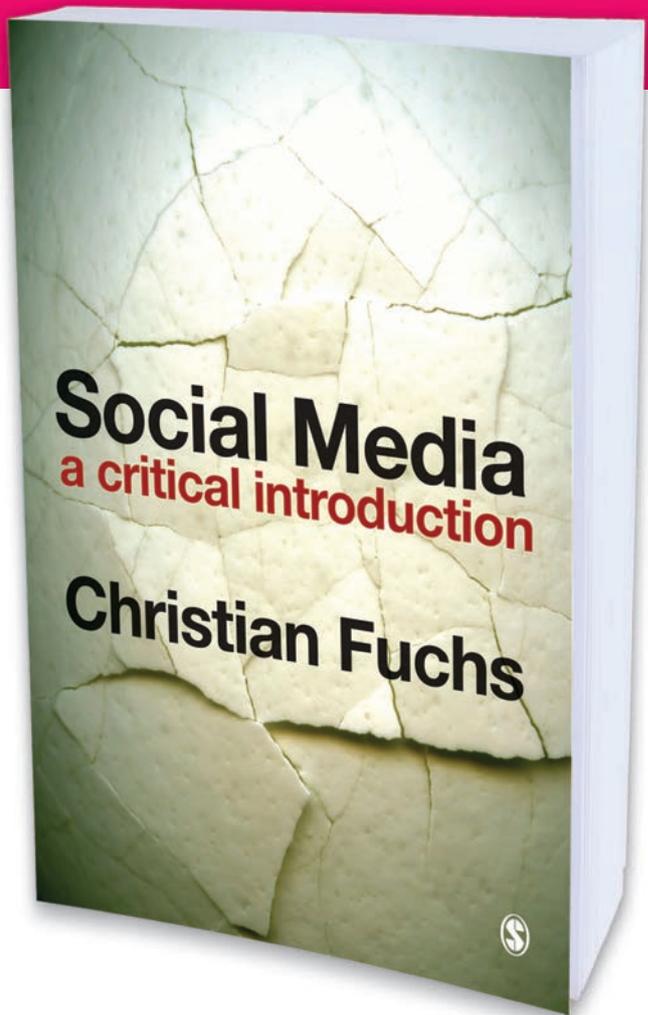
Showing the reader how to ask the right kinds of questions about social media, Christian Fuchs takes us on a journey across social media, delving deep into case studies on Google, Facebook, Twitter, WikiLeaks and Wikipedia. The result lays bare the structures and power relations at the heart of our media landscape.

This book is the essential, critical guide for all students of media studies and sociology. Readers will never look at social media the same way again.

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## 60 SECONDS WITH CHRISTIAN FUCHS

### If you could have a conversation with any media theorist from the past, who would you choose and what would you ask them?

I would talk with critical media scholar Dallas Smythe about the role of audience commodification and audience labour in the age of social media, the role and importance of Karl Marx and critical thinking for understanding communications, and the notion of digital labour.

### Which researchers or writers inspire you?

I find it helpful to engage with critical and philosophical approaches such as Hegel's philosophy, Marx's critique of capitalism and Marcuse's critical theory of society, as starting points for building a critical theory of digital and social media.

One of the works that most influenced my thinking is Marcuse's Reason and Revolution. It helped me to really understand Hegel's dialectical philosophy, an approach on which I base my own theory and research. Marcuse stresses the dialectic of potentiality and actuality. So, social media as we know it today are a specific realization of the potentials of the Internet - a realization that features, as I show in my book, the exploitation of digital labour, the logic of personal data as commodity, capital accumulation using targeted advertising and a control model that makes use of mass surveillance.

This dialectic of potentiality and actuality means that what actually exists has the potential to be changed. Dialectical thinking in the end compels us to think about what world we want to live in, what media we want to have and if it's worth engaging in a struggle for realizing and making a difference.

### What advice would you give a first year media and communication studies student in 2014?

Critical thinking skills are essential. Critical thinking means asking questions about power, control, ownership, political economy and how specific phenomena are connected to each other and to society as a whole. It is important that students learn how to read academic articles, form and express grounded opinions, discuss academic and political issues in the classroom, and develop self-confidence in one's own knowledge to speak in public and make good arguments.

### What was the most enjoyable aspect of writing Social Media?

It is interesting to think about how to use critical theory for understanding the world of social media. I enjoyed writing the more general parts that focus on what social media, communication power, participation and political economy actually are, as well as the case studies looking at Google, Facebook, Twitter, WikiLeaks and Wikipedia. A good book brings together general theory with the presentation of specific cases.

