

Queer Cybercultures and Digital Activism: Transformations in LGBTQ+ Digital Spaces

Pain, Paromita (ed.) 2022. *LGBTQ Digital Cultures: A Global Perspective*. New York: Routledge. (278 pages)

THE IMPACTS OF social media and digital technologies have become ubiquitous, especially in social movement organising and activism. LGBTQ activism and advocacy are significant when discussing how these digital platforms have been used in novel and transformative ways by activists from local and transnational contexts. This edited collection, prepared by Paromita Pain and titled *LGBTQ Digital Cultures: A Global Perspective*, takes a comprehensive and critical look at how social media and digital technologies have shaped LGBTQ activism (and vice versa), offering a transnational and intersectional perspective. In an incorporating introduction, Pain highlights the need for a broader examination of LGBTQ presence in online spaces, with a timely critique of the US and Western dominance within LGBTQ studies. Recognising the understudied aspects of the field, the collection provides a global perspective on queer cybercultures and digital activism. It is authored by researchers and activists bringing situated examples from different geographies, such as Bangladesh, Canada, China, the Dominican Republic, India, Iran, Mexico, the Philippines, Turkey, and the United States. The con-

tributors have interdisciplinary backgrounds focusing on queer feminist media and communications practices. By examining the intersections of race, disability, colonialism, sexuality, and gender, the contributors highlight how digital technologies have expanded the boundaries of queer cultural production and enabled transformative practices. From media representation to identity politics, this edited collection unravels the complex dynamics in online–offline networking, delving into the tensions that arise as LGBTQ individuals navigate visibility, hiddenness, renditions of the self, and collective constructions of identity across diverse global contexts.

Alongside the editor's introduction, the book consists of 18 consecutive chapters, written by authors with expertise in digital media and queer studies. The collection showcases the emergent “queer counterpublics” across time and space, enabling the formation of queer digital cultures. With a global perspective challenging the Eurocentric narratives in queer media studies, the authors from various contexts delve into different social media as collective sites of communication and resistance against oppressive power structures. One of the vital contributions of the book is empirical. The authors brilliantly showcase the relationship between local LGBTQ struggles and the affordances of different social media platforms. For instance, Jessica Sage Rauchberg's (Ch. 14) analysis of *TikTok* shows the algorithmic oppression of queer counterpublics through the racist, anti-queer, and ableist shadowbanning practices of the platform. At the same time, Kailyn Slater (Ch. 11) analyses how the same platform affords alternative and subcultural expressions through algorithmic resistance by queer and trans individuals in the United States. Songyin Liu's (Ch. 7) and Yidong Wang's (Ch. 13) studies of the online platform *Weibo* show us how the platform works as a networked public in China, providing a space for discussing issues such as same-sex marriage and transgender rights, especially in contexts with authoritarian surveillance on social media platforms. Focusing on trans activism in Turkey, Esra Özban (Ch. 9) explores how YouTube became the alternative media for activists from Pembe Hayat Association during the governmental ban on LGBTQ events.

One of the important take-ups from this volume is that digital affordances are not always facilitators of emancipation. Rather, algorithmic homophobia and the cyberbullying faced by LGBTQ youth on popular social media platforms stand out as pressing issues. Another major contribution of the edited collection is the discussions regarding translocal and transnational LGBTQ visibility through networked publics of the digital spaces. Pain argues that digital technologies provide space for marginalised bodies and identities not accurately represented in mainstream media.

Overall, the collection has a wide range of chapters that add to the discussion on visibility, queer community-building, and queer world-building. Matthew Hester, in a chapter on hypersexual cyber-queer activism on social media (Ch. 12), investigates the anti-(homo)sexual environment within which cyberqueers find themselves. In this regard, a virginal desexualised form of visibility has overtaken social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *TikTok*, and *Twitter* through multiple censorship movements. The analysis suggests embodied activism based on lived experiences is a way to provide the hypersexual aspects of queer lives. The Eurocentric equation of visibility with emancipation in the LGBTQ struggle is also critiqued in the book from several aspects. Sreyoshi Day's (Ch. 10) analysis shows how queer counterpublics in India go beyond visibility regimes by finding hidden spaces against bullying and surveillance through online presence on *Facebook*. By recognising the importance of physical connections for solidarity, the author investigates how *Facebook* has provided safer spaces for queer presence and unsettled the urban/rural divide. Niloofar Hooman (Ch. 6) analyses the usage of *Instagram* by LGBTQ counterpublics in Iran. The Iranian case shows how *Instagram* functions as an alternative to queer visibility, while being visible in the public sphere remains unsafe for the LGBTQ population of Iran.

An important contribution of *LGBTQ Digital Cultures* is that it brings an intersectional lens to the analyses of queer cyberculture. The collection recognises the crucial role of topics such as race, disability, and colonialism in defining the representations of gender and sexuality on social

media platforms. For instance, Roy Celaire's (Ch. 4) autoethnographic study investigates the colonialist and racist identifications of "normal sex" dominated by white gay men on dating apps such as *Hinge* and *Tinder*. The author argues that black gay bodies are easily defined as "the other" in sexual spaces and hypersexualised by the colonial white gaze on dating apps. In her chapter, Lydia Huerta Moreno (Ch. 5) focuses on trans asylum seekers at the Mexico–US border, showcasing how institutionalised transphobia and racism violate trans bodies' asylum processes. By providing the digital testimonios of trans activists, Moreno shows how digital spaces provide a genealogy of asylum-seeking trans' experiences showcasing the intersections of migration with gender, race, and coloniality.

Overall, *LGBTQ Digital Activism* is an excellent collection of essays that presents empirical studies with novel digital methodological approaches. The rich analyses of different forms of LGBTQ activism, which I have only to a limited extent been able to account for in this short review, provide the readers with a useful map to see similarities between differently located struggles, alongside their particularities. This edited collection is also a timely intervention and a critique of Eurocentric LGBTQ activism studies, analysing long-lasting and dynamic struggles from both the Global South and the Global North. Pain candidly acknowledges the book's geographical limitations, the lack of comparative approach between cases, and the lack of a class dimension within the intersectional perspective, yet uses them as stepping stones to motivate future researchers to delve deeper into these subjects. The book's digital methodologies and ethnographic inquiries offer novel perspectives for feminist and queer research, while the essays advocate for the ontologies of everyday resistance within queer counter-publics, inspiring activists to embark on transformative actions. Overall, *LGBTQ Digital Activism* is a compelling resource that sheds light on the complex dynamics of LGBTQ activism in the digital age.

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