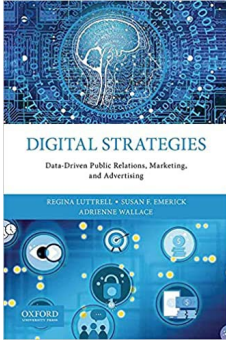# B O O K   R E V I E W

Book Review Editor

Russell Kirkscey, *Penn State Harrisburg*

Digital Strategies: Data-Driven Public Relations, Marketing, and Advertising

Regina Luttrell, Susan F. Emerick, and Adrienne Wallace, Authors

New York, NY

Oxford University Press
2022, 249 pp.

Reviewed by Laurence José

Grand Valley State University

*D*igital Strategies examines emerging technologies and their role for building data-driven decisions in the fields of public relations, marketing, and advertising. The content is resolutely tailored to pedagogical contexts and alternates between general explanations and definitions, case studies, and reflections. Designed explicitly as a means "to improve the readiness of students entering the fields of public relations and marketing" (p. ix), the book has also a lot to offer to technical communication curricula through its focus on topics such as risk communication, design and visual storytelling, social media writing and influencers, corporation and activism, user-generated content and crowdsourcing, search engine optimization, social customer experience, and geofencing and audience targeting.

From a teaching and program administration perspective, one of the book's most appealing characteristics is its organization and attention to keeping the content accessible and practice-based with a clear focus on explaining through current real-life examples and connecting concepts to professional contexts. In other words, the book

is designed for teaching and, specifically, for encouraging students to connect what they learn in the classroom to their civic and future professional lives. The idea of 'bridge' between academia and industry invoked by the authors to frame their work in the introduction is visible throughout the whole book. For instance, each of the 12 chapters is bookended with a list of key learning outcomes and application exercises, discussion questions, key terms, and notes with references, thereby making it easy to incorporate all or specific chapters into a classroom.

The book's pedagogical relevance is further amplified by the chapter distribution into two main sections that basically correspond to a move from theory to practice. The first section, Chapters 1–3, provides a general framework with an overview of the role of artificial intelligence (AI) technology and data in today's marketing, communications, and public relations landscape. The second section, Chapters 4–12, is a collection of case studies showing concrete illustrations of the strategies described in part one, with examples from a range of companies (e.g., Facebook, Patagonia, Starbucks). Besides their overall relevance and timeliness, some of these examples offer interesting ways to (re) think and connect marketing campaigns to topics such as rhetorical listening (e.g., The "Life Alive" campaign and the role of media influencers). It is worth noting that the final chapter, Chapter 12, shifts the book's perspective from recent past and present toward the more long-term future with questions and insights from 10 professionals from industry and higher education regarding the role and implications of big data analytics in marketing, advertising, and public relation initiatives. This intertwining of scholarship, educators' perspectives, and industry experience is one of the book's most compelling qualities.

Even though its explicit targeting of advertising and public relations curricula may make it easy for technical and scientific communication teachers and program administrators to overlook it, this book presents an in-depth examination of what rhetoric in action is, and can be, in the age of digital communication, AI, and big data analytics. From questions surrounding the role of technology and digital data in communication design to issues regarding audience reach and profiling, participatory design and listening, user experience, ethics, algorithms, privacy, or AI and the automatization of writing, just to name a few, *Digital Strategies* raises a plethora of relevant questions and offers creative ways to highlight intersections with current debates in technical communication. As such, it can easily have a place in a technical communication curriculum, as a whole or through select chapters, including in courses such as business communication, introduction

to professional communication, data design, or visual rhetoric and design. In addition to the case studies that make it a great resource for finding current examples, the style and language are a perfect illustration of what technical communication should be, with a conscious effort to keep the language accessible while encouraging readers to reflect on the larger ramifications of the different discussion points.

Beyond illustrating the fluidity of disciplinary borders, the relevance of *Digital Strategies* for a technical communication audience also serves as a reminder of the necessity for teachers and program administrators alike to account for the impact of (big) data-driven decisions on the field. In a 2017 article, Jordan Frith contended that the field "must reflect on the epistemological and theoretical consequences of the big data hype" and that "recognizing the ways in which big data discourses render invisible the necessary levels of communication helps us identify how technical communication skills fit within these projects" (p. 183). In this regard, *Digital Strategies* can also be read as a means to explore the significance of big data and data-driven decisions for the role of technical communicators. As Frith notes, "[if] the data in big data approaches could truly represent the world completely and remove human bias and interpretation from the equation, technical communicators would be less important. Companies would no longer need anyone to turn data into accessible narratives because the findings would be self-explanatory" (2017, p. 175). Where *Digital Strategies* concludes with a call for marketing, public relations, and advertising professionals to keep developing skills for ongoing developments in data analytics and the use of AI, technical communication readers can draw from this argument to continue and feed a much needed discussion about the impact of big data on the changing needs for technical communication skills in the workplace. If Luttrell et al. mainly emphasize in *Digital Strategies* ways for future public relations and advertising professionals to strategize data-driven insights, their comments on "businesses and social responsibility" (Chapter 7) and their concluding call for attending to the ethical dilemmas raised by AI (Chapter 12) make the book a good fit for any curriculum and program focused on the reality of what it means to be a professional communicator in today's digital landscape.

References

Frith, Jordan. (2017). Big data, technical communication, and the smart city. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 31*(2), 168–187.

Author Information

Laurence José is an Associate Professor of Writing and the Director of the Digital Studies minor at Grand Valley State University where she teaches classes in professional writing, visual rhetoric, and digital studies. Her research interests include data design, cross-cultural communication, writing pedagogy, and program administration. Her work has appeared in journals in the US and France, and different edited collections. Between 2008 and 2015, she contributed to *Programmatic Perspectives* in different ways, including as the book review editor and as an assistant and associate editor.