BOOK REVIEW

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KATALIN FEHER (2025). GENERATIVE AI, MEDIA, AND SOCIETY. ROUTLEDGE, 192 PP., ISBN: 9781032968735

The book 'Generative AI, Media, and Society' by Katalin Feher (Routledge, 2025) is one of the first comprehensive attempts to capture generative artificial intelligence in the context of media and society. The author explores a highly relevant topic, introducing an interdisciplinary perspective that combines media studies, sociology, political science, ethics, and computer science. The book was published at a moment of explosive interest in generative AI, when models producing text, images, or music are storming the media and public imagination. The title suggests an ambitious goal: to analyze the impact of generative AI on media and society as a whole. After reading it, I must admit that Feher provides a broad overview of the phenomenon and organizes the content into six clear chapters devoted respectively to transformations, generative AI itself, media, uncertainties, ethics, and politics.

Feher consciously narrows the scope to generative tools such as ChatGPT and other multimodal systems. This, however, helps her avoid generalizations and precisely demonstrates how these technologies affect creativity, authorship, or authenticity, which in my opinion, is key to clarifying the terminology. I also greatly appreciate her didactic approach: each chapter ends with problem questions, project suggestions, and artistic reflections.

The thematic scope is broad: from social changes linked to the development of AI, through the functioning of generative systems, to the blurring of boundaries between traditional and synthetic media. Particularly apt is her treatment of media convergence, in which she describes robotic journalism, immersive content, and the risks associated with disinformation. The chapters on ethics and politics are compelling, as the author goes beyond general slogans and refers to concrete concepts such as dual-use AI, trusted AI principles, and human rights–based regulations. This approach is particularly valuable in the context of current strategies developed by the EU and OECD. In many places, Feher introduces memorable terms and images that illuminate understanding the nature of these new tools. She writes of "statistical parrots" – language models generating text without understanding it, of the "Turing trap" that users fall into when attributing intelligence to machines, and of "generative colonization," meaning the gradual takeover of creative space by AI systems. All of this is illustrated with examples from the work of the European Digital Media Observatory

to cases of abuses revealed by law enforcement. The book also includes a glossary that organizes terminology and makes a generally unfamiliar topic more accessible to readers.

This content is impressive and comprehensive. Feher touches on most of the obvious themes related to generative AI – from technical foundations, through changes in media and business, to issues of ethics and public policy. However, I must make a few critical remarks. My main concerns relate to the book's methodological and perspectival limitations.

The biggest shortcoming is the book's brevity. Just over 190 pages is insufficient to tackle such a complex topic. Another aspect that deserves attention is the method of research itself. 'Generative AI, Media, and Society' does not present any original empirical research. There are no results from experiments, interviews, or data analysis conducted by the author. The book is more essayistic and review-based, which is not a problem itself if intentional. Yet Feher does not clearly specify her methodology. The six-chapter structure gives an impression of systematicity, but it is systematicity of organization, not of research method. She synthesizes many threads and sources: from classic concepts in media studies, through industry reports, to current ethical debates. Unfortunately, at times this synthesis seems to come at the expense of deeper critical analysis. There is a lack of rigorous testing of claims against data. For instance, when discussing AI's impact on the job market, Feher outlines scenarios and general observations but does not present new research or empirically verify how AI is currently affecting specific professions. As a result, many of the book's statements remain at the level of broad generalizations. At times, the publication resembles an expert essay, very inspiring and well-written, but without the rigor of research.

Another noticeable issue is the one-sided selection of examples and sources. Most of them come from Anglophone reports, major tech companies, or well-known futurists. It remains unclear why Feher chose these as key. This is probably tied to her geographical perspective. Almost the entire narrative is situated in the realities of the so-called Global North – wealthy, industrialized societies of Europe and North America. She scarcely steps outside this sphere. There are no references to how generative AI is perceived or used in Africa, South America, most of Asia, or the Middle East. Such Euro-American centrism is typical in tech publications, but it is a flaw here, given the book's aspiration to address "media and society" as a whole. Society does not end with the OECD. This is an important gap, as the impact of AI on society may look very different elsewhere. Consequently, the universality of Feher's conclusions is limited. She frames recommendations as if universally applicable—but are they? When she discusses human rights in relation to AI, she assumes a shared standard, while in China or other authoritarian regimes, the conversation takes place in a different framework (e.g., social control).

In short, the book lacks global imagination. In my view, this is a significant oversight. In 2025, as debates on AI ethics intensify, voices from beyond the West on decolonizing AI and the need to include local contexts are becoming stronger. Feher uses the term "generative colonization" to describe algorithmic bias and data appropriation, but only metaphorically, without engaging with postcolonial critiques of technology. That is a pity, since there is a growing body of critical literature showing how AI systems embed colonial logics and reinforce inequalities. This absence makes the book's perspective Western-centric and limits its universal relevance. For a Polish reader (or anyone outside the main AI hubs) the book may fail to address locally specific questions. This does not undermine Feher's general insights into media and AI, but it cautions us against treating them as universally valid. Perhaps her next work will fill this gap, as Feher herself (and others) acknowledge the need to study AI in diverse cultural, linguistic, and social contexts.

This geographical narrowing is tied to another limitation: the range of theoretical perspectives through which the author views AI. Feher relies mainly on mainstream frameworks: media theory (e.g., McLuhan's concept of "metamedia"), STS (science and technology studies), principle-based AI ethics (e.g., Trusted AI guidelines), and innovation management. All valuable, but we miss alternative, critical approaches that have flourished in recent years. These include postcolonial, feminist, and critical social theory perspectives on technology. Such frameworks provide sharper tools of analysis, showing AI not merely as a neutral technique but as a product of power relations, ideologies, and social structures. In Feher's book, these voices remain subdued. She briefly mentions bias and generative colonization, but only in a passing manner. There is no engagement with the work of Ruhi Chan, Safiya Noble, Joy Buolamwini, Kate Crawford, and others who analyze AI in terms of race, gender, and inequality. Their work has shown, for instance, that AI systems can reinforce racial biases (e.g., facial recognition struggling with darker skin), that voice assistants reproduce the "secretary" stereotype (nearly always female voices), and that large language models perpetuate sexist and racist associations embedded in data. Such issues are practically absent here. There is no discussion of how generative AI may reproduce structures of power, for example, English-language dominance in models marginalizing other languages (linguistic imperialism), or the embedding of Western cultural values into systems (as argued by scholars of AI coloniality).

Of course, no single book can cover everything. Perhaps the author intentionally chose a certain level of generality to appeal to a broad audience of policymakers and experts. Still, omitting these alternative theoretical perspectives makes Feher's analysis less multidimensional. The book stays within the safe corridor of mainstream AI debates, focusing on ethics, policy, and some risks, without fundamentally questioning big tech's business models. Yet critical

theorists would ask: Is "ethical AI" possible at all under surveillance capitalism? Is generative AI a tool of emancipation or a new form of cultural oppression? Such questions are absent here.

In conclusion, 'Generative AI, Media, and Society' is an important, timely, and much-needed book, especially in academia. Its greatest strength lies in its accessible, interdisciplinary treatment of the subject and its didactic structure, making it an excellent resource for teaching and discussion. For me, it was inspiring and clarifying, yet it left me hungry for deeper, more critical analysis. I see it as a solid starting point: a textbook that opens doors to reflection but does not yet provide the complete answers we still await.

Urszula Soler
THE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LUBLIN, POLAND