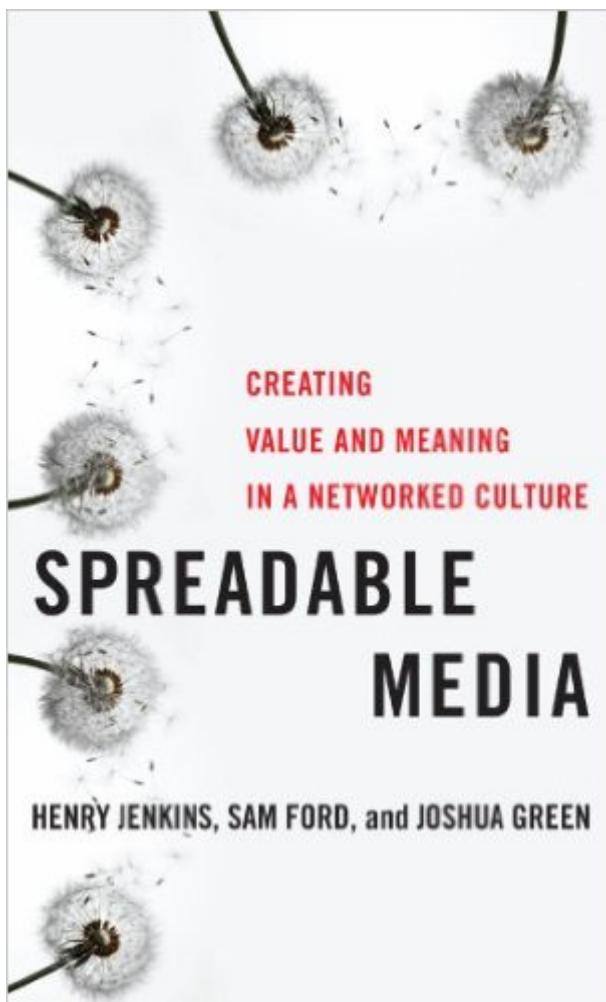


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# Spreadable Media: Creating Value And Meaning In A Networked Culture (Postmillennial Pop)



## Synopsis

Spreadable Media maps fundamental changes taking place in our contemporary media environment, a space where corporations no longer tightly control media distribution and many of us are directly involved in the circulation of content. It contrasts "stickiness" — "aggregating attention in centralized places" with "spreadability" — "dispersing content widely through both formal and informal networks, some approved, many unauthorized. Stickiness has been the measure of success in the broadcast era (and has been carried over to the online world), but "spreadability" describes the ways content travels through social media. Following up on the hugely influential *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, this book challenges some of the prevailing metaphors and frameworks used to describe contemporary media, from biological metaphors like "memes" and "virals" to the concept of "Web 2.0" and the popular notion of "influencers." Spreadable Media examines the nature of audience engagement, the environment of participation, the way appraisal creates value, and the transnational flows at the heart of these phenomena. It delineates the elements that make content more spreadable and highlights emerging media business models built for a world of participatory circulation. The book also explores the internal tensions companies face as they adapt to the new communication reality and argues for the need to shift from "hearing" to "listening" in corporate culture. Drawing on examples from film, music, games, comics, television, transmedia storytelling, advertising, and public relations industries, among others "from both the U.S. and around the world" the authors illustrate the contours of our current media environment. They highlight the vexing questions content creators must tackle and the responsibilities we all face as citizens in a world where many of us regularly circulate media content. Written for any and all of us who actively create and share media content, Spreadable Media provides a clear understanding of how people are spreading ideas and the implications these activities have for business, politics, and everyday life.

## Book Information

Series: Postmillennial Pop

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: NYU Press (January 21, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0814743501

ISBN-13: 978-0814743508

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ  (25 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #44,082 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 inÂ  Books > Law > Media & the Law #201 inÂ  Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Communication & Media Studies #222 inÂ  Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > General

## **Customer Reviews**

It's a little bizarre that a popular (at least according to sales figures) book about passing along media or commentary has gone over a month without having a review posted. I think it's because this is an ingenious, yet jam-packed book that looks at online participation and the sharing of information from a unique perspective that just plain forces you to think. This is not a quick read. While there are plenty of social media books out that look at the "new phenomenon" of sharing as an organizational strategy or as platforms of tools as compelling new ways to share, the authors of "Spreadable Media" look more at the material itself that is or isn't being shared. What characteristics of materials make people want to spread them? What's in it for the sharer? When people read, hear or watch something that makes them want to circulate it, what triggers that decision? The authors point out there's nothing really new about this motivation. The passing down of keepsakes, family heirlooms, newspaper articles, scrapbooks, family trees, etc. has gone on for generations. First the photocopier and now social media platforms have just made it easier and almost instantaneous. The main focus of the book is on the broadcast, mass-media business model of "stickiness" of content vs. the parallel concept of "spreadability." It's becoming increasingly apparent that if media doesn't spread today, it's dead--like a film/song/book/work of art/best practice no one sees/hears/reads/studies/tries. So while there's a loss of control in allowing your audience to manipulate and pass along one's creative effort, there's also an expanded opportunity that it will uncover new audiences and be more widely acclaimed than if you protect it and threaten users for "stealing it." Corporations, institutions, universities and other power structures are starting to recognize that. Perhaps one reason "Spreadable Media" may be slow to generate reviews is in the sheer breadth of their analysis. My personal reason for reading "Spreadable Media" was to create company communities where members will pass along content to co-workers and customers to expand product knowledge and benefits and ultimately to increase sales. Some of the most insightful information I've read about this topic is indeed covered in this book. The authors portray "lurkers" (the bane of online communities where the vast majority of members who only consume

others' information without contributing any of their own) as only learning and biding their time until they too understand the rules and start to participate. In Chapter 5 they even describe what makes materials sharable. This will help me to completely rethink the development of content rather than just to focus on why community members are either engaged or not. The density issue comes into play, however, as they go through a variety of entertainment, mass-media examples about how and why we are all moving toward spreadability. These examples are interesting to consider but can be difficult to digest. There are probably few readers who have all these perspectives who can follow these various threads. So if the authors have done anything "wrong" in the book it is just the amount of commentary on how much our culture is changing to address ways that we learn across all aspects of our lifestyles. In summary then, "Spreadable Media" is a great book but prepare yourself for some pretty deep but original thinking as Jenkins, Ford and Green argue for the increasingly networked world we're all living in.

First of all, I want to commend Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green on their 46-page Introduction that, all by itself, is worth more than the cost of the book while "setting the table" for an even more substantial feast of information, insights, and counsel in the seven chapters that follow. As they explain, their book "examines the emerging hybrid model of [content] circulation, where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways... This shift from distribution to circulation signals a movement toward a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumer of preconstructed messages [e.g. book reviews of this book] but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined." In this context, I am reminded of Henry Chesbrough and the open business model for which he is so widely and justifiably renowned. As he explains in *Open Innovation* (2005), "An open business model uses this new division of innovation labor - both in the creation of value and in the capture of a portion of that value. Open models create value by leveraging many more ideas, due to their inclusion of a variety of external concepts. Open models can also enable greater value capture, by using a key asset, resource, or position not only in the company's own business model but also in other companies businesses." In their book, Jenkins, Ford, and Green focus on the "social logics and practices that have enabled and popularized [social media's] new platforms, logics that explain [begin italics] why [end italics] sharing has become such a common practice, not just [begin italics] how [end italics]." The terms "spread," "spreadable," and "spreadability" are indeed appropriate, given the almost unlimited opportunities for communication, cooperation, and

collaboration that an open business model creates for social media. The potentialities - both technical and cultural -- for connection and interaction are there to be seized by those who recognize and then take full advantage the increasingly pervasive forms of media circulation. These are among the dozens of passages that caught my eye, also listed to suggest the scope of coverage.

- o What Susan Boyle Can Teach About Spreadability (Pages 9-16)
- o Toward a New Moral Economy, Stolen Content or Exploited Labor, and Engaged, Not Exploited? (52-61)
- o Value, Worth, and Meaning (67-72)
- o Toward Transparent Marketing, and, We don't Need Influencers (75-82)
- o Systems of Appraisal (87-90)
- o From the Residual to the Retro, and, Residual Economics (100-106)
- o Are You Engaged? and, The Challenges of Measurement (116-126)
- o "The Total Engagement Experience" (137-141)
- o A Brief History of Participatory Culture, and, Resistance versus Participation (159-172)
- o Hearing versus Listening (175-182)
- o The Problem of Unequal Participation (188-194)
- o The Uncertainty Principle (196-202)
- o How Long Is the Long Tail? (238-242)
- o Learning from Nollywood (265-270)
- o The World Is Not Flat (284-290)
- o Spreadability Focal Points (295-300)

Before concluding their brilliant book, Jenkins, Ford, and Green identify a number of issues about a spreadable media environment that remain unresolved. For example, "If, for many of us, the long-term goal is to create a more democratic culture, which allows the public a greater role in decision-making at all levels, then a key requirement is going to be timely access to information and transparency in decision-making." Governance issues, especially regulation within a global digital community, suggest major implications for both better or worse. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green observe, "For the foreseeable future, these issues will be under debate between and among all participating parties. The shape of our culture, thank goodness, is still under transition, and - as a consequence - it is still possible for us to collectively struggle to shape the terms of a spreadable media environment and to forge a media environment that is more inclusive, more dynamic, and more participatory than before." I share that hope and am encouraged by the fact that achieving that vision would not have been possible only a few years ago. I realize that no brief commentary such as mine can do full justice to the material that is provided in this volume but I hope that I have at least suggested why I think so highly of it. Also, I hope that those who read this commentary will be better prepared to determine whether or not they wish to read the book and, in that event, will have at least some idea of how to create value and meaning continuously at all levels and in all areas of their organization's operation.

Jenkins reinforces his thesis of participative and convergence culture, adding now the notion of spreadable media. People take advantage of digital devices to spread their artifacts particularly in

social platforms, opening chances to build learning communities, fans activities, globalized movements (grassroots) etc. He tries to maintain highly critical view, avoiding to discover alternative paths where there aren't. Especially he cultivates profoundly critical position in face of capitalism's market forces, since these are determined to monetize all social platforms in the name of private profit. Well documented in empirical cases and media releases, this book reveals great research talent, critical balance, very good theorizing insight, and future vision.

This is an excellent volume that should be required reading for anyone studying the media. While I would have liked to see more discussion of the public sphere and the implications of the media environment for the evolution of political processes and systems, the authors are more interested in culture which is understandable given their collective past work. And while I may disagree with minor points throughout the book, it is an excellent read that motivates the reader to truly think about the implications of the changing media environment

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