Book Review: Arab Media Moguls by Donatella Della Ratta, Naomi Sakr, and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen (Eds.) Arab Media Moguls. R....
individual journalist’s level, the book reveals that media practitioners also have engaged with social media in one way or another, personally and professionally. As the study unveils, pan-Arab journalists use social media in distinctive ways: crowdsourcing ideas from audiences to enrich their programs, driving traffic to their own or their organizations’ central websites/portals, sharing links with audiences on issues not directly addressed by employer organizations, and commenting on developments in the region and around the world. Journalists also use social media for news-gathering purposes. These include gaining access to news sources, checking rumors, networking, and dissemination.

A great strength of this book is its recency. Most of the data analyzed in the study are from 2014, as presented in the tables. The book also mentions some recent events from 2015 as examples to illustrate the role of social media in the current newsroom. Considering the long turn-around cycle for publishing a book, this recency is quite impressive. It is also noteworthy that the authors are clearly experts in the subject matter, as demonstrated in the very knowledgeable and authoritative observations, comments, and arguments.

A central theme of the book, as the authors point out, is that social media will be transforming the traditional model of journalism as practiced not only in North America and Europe but also in the MENA region. I share this view and further believe that this will go beyond MENA. While journalists elsewhere, particularly those struggling in severe state-controlled and ideologically censored communication environments, continue to manage to survive in this social media era, this research has great global relevance.


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Arab Media Moguls analyzes careers and positions of influential media moguls in the Arab World. Specifically, the volume examines a set of features associated with media moguls—family roots, family role in business and succession, types of risks taken in media business, styles of management, and moguls’ relationship with inner circles of political power. Donatella Della Ratta and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen are based at the University of Copenhagen. The former is Postdoctoral Fellow, and the latter is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Naomi Sakr is Professor of Media Policy at the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) at the University of Westminster, and Director of CAMRI Arab Media Center.

In reading this book, it is important to understand three key terms associated with media entrepreneurship—“media mogul,” “crown prince,” and “media baron.” Ratta and colleagues describe “media mogul” as a person who largely built up his own
media empire. This entrepreneurial element can include the launching of new media enterprises, but in practice often consists largely in buying up and taking over existing media companies. “Crown prince” is the second-generation media entrepreneur, who typically inherits major media properties from his pioneering father. Normally, media barons support the mogul—and the work of the baron is to manage divisions or companies within the mogul’s larger interests. A baron can be a chief executive, who may also take entrepreneurial risks, but he is not the ultimate owner or controller of the overall enterprise.

Justifying the significance of the book, the authors argue that Arab media matter, and so too do Arab media moguls. Therefore, the Arab World provides fertile grounds for investigating media moguldom. Similarly, Ratta and colleagues contend this is an important topic of analysis because (a) in the last twenty years, a group of Arab media moguls has emerged, successfully challenged the state-owned media of individual Arab states, and built companies for the pan-Arab market; and (b) the specific political, social, and economic circumstances of the Arab world have created a distinct specimen of the media mogul. Media liberalization and privatization in the Middle East region have also contributed to the emergence of Arab media moguls.

_Arab Media Moguls_ comprises eleven chapters. Chapter 1 written by Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen introduces the book’s main theme—highlighting careers of major Arab media moguls. In Chapter 2, Joe Khalil investigates the modalities of Arab media governance. Chapter 3 by Zahera Harb focuses on Antoine Choueiri—the “President” of Arab advertising. Harb explores the political and economic factors that made Choueiri, aka “Le President,” such a recognizable figure in business, media, and sport in the Arab World. Chapter 4 by Sarah El-Richani discusses the story of Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation and its owner Pierre Daher. In Chapter 5, Katharina Notzold charts the rise of Lebanon’s former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the relationship between his media investments and political-business maneuvers. Ehab Galal’s Chapter 6 focuses on Saleh Kamel, a Saudi Arabian sheikh who has invested heavily in media business. Najat Alsaied (in Chapter 7) focuses on media mogul Walid al-Ibrahim who has built a USS2.9 billion business empire from his Middle East Broadcasting Corporation. In Chapter 8, using the case of Saudi royal prince and media mogul Alwaleed bin Talal, Marwan Kraidy explores how a media capital approach enables a new understanding of media moguldom. Donatella Della Ratta in Chapter 9 profiles media mogul Tarak Ben Ammar in light of the idea of a modern entrepreneur as described by Joseph Schumpeter—that is, somebody who carries out a creative act that drives economic development and growth, yet does not necessarily generate profit in the short term. Thus, Ratta argues that Ammar has introduced the Schumpeterian “new combinations” in a variety of domains, from film making to finance and banking activities. Naomi Sakr, in Chapter 10, problematizes power and agency in relation to media investments by Naguib Sawiris, a wealthy Egyptian media investor. And Chapter 11 by Tourya Guaybess reviews the main actors in Egypt’s privately owned media sector.

This is an important text that provides very useful behind the scenes insights on media ownership and management in the Arab World. The authors should be commended for crafting such a fact-laden, entertaining, and informative work which
enriches existing literature on media systems—more so media ownership and governance in the Middle East. Suited for graduate studies, the book is well-written in a simple language that makes it very attractive to a wide range of readers not necessarily in the communication field.

In a nutshell, anyone exploring media in Middle East will find this volume highly useful in understanding five major things: (a) the leading Arab media entrepreneurs; (b) Arab media management juxtaposed between state politics and economic interests—a delicate balance for media operations and survival; (c) forces that determine media content (most powerful being state, politics, and media ownership)—all of which could be examined under the hierarchy-of-influences theory advanced by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese; (d) Arab media ownership in relation to establishment, shareholding, and takeovers and counter-takeovers—depending on the prevailing political environment; and (e) the centrality of Arab media in power and politics—in addition to the objective of profit-making.


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A strong contribution to the critical literature on public relations is Christopher Caldiero’s *NEO-PR: Public Relations in a Postmodern World*.

Three quick takes on the book: First, it will be an intellectually stimulating delight for geeky PR academics who appreciate studying the nuances and intricacies of how PR is both reflective and shaping of the cultures—both macro and micro—in which it operates. Second, students will need a good teacher to help them mine the gold nuggets of insight buried in necessarily complex contexts and arguments. Third, PR professionals are going to need some patience while working through the academic language en route to real-world advice.

*NEO-PR* opens with a discussion on the cultural constructs of *modernism* and, more to the book’s focus, *postmodernism*. The author acknowledges the challenge of precisely and comprehensively defining those concepts/eras/movements, yet does a nice job in summing them up (notably in mass media contexts), especially for those of us only vaguely familiar with modernism or postmodernism and holding no pretense of deeply understanding their artistic and philosophical manifestations. More important, the author, who is Professor of Communication Studies at Farleigh Dickinson University, uses familiar U.S. PR icons such as Bernays, Creel, and Lee, anchoring their legendary PR work in modernism, and then moves us toward the argument that today’s PR practitioners function, or ought to function, with postmodern approaches.