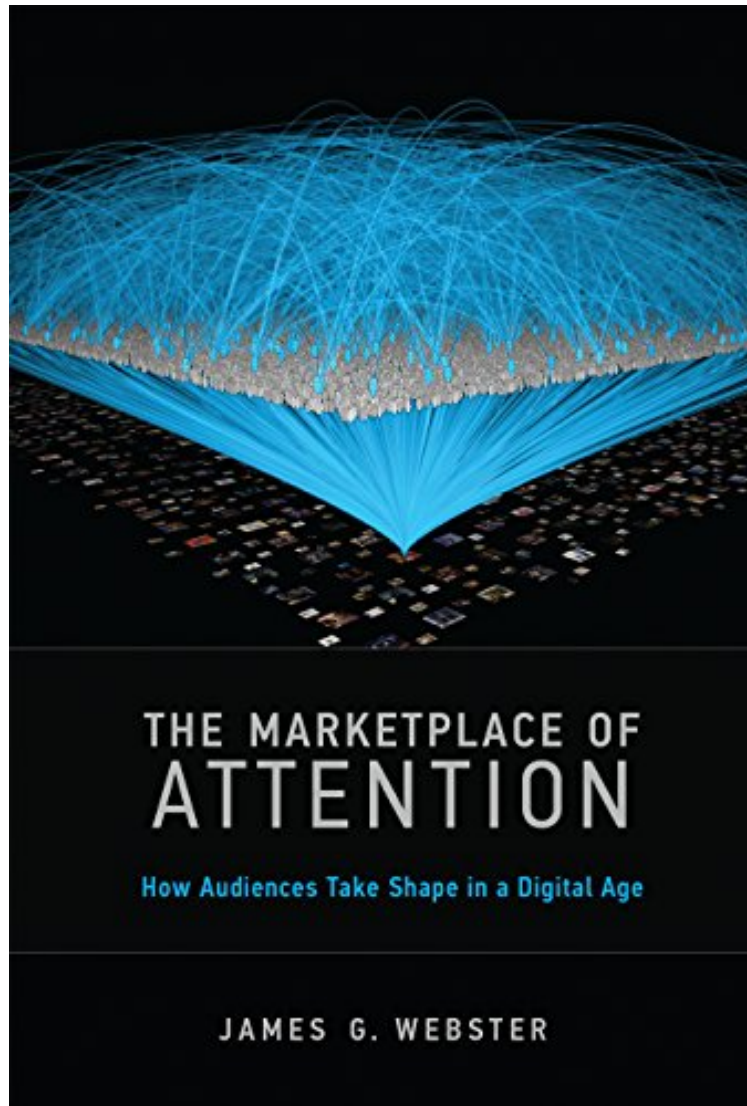


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## The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age (MIT Press)

*James G. Webster*

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**James G. Webster : The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age (MIT Press)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age (MIT Press):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. and it is useful to know that mankind dealt successfully with the others By Ian Mann Author James Webster, is a Professor of Communication Studies at Northwestern University. His book reflects his scholarly, interdisciplinary approach, but will be of interest to groups beyond fellow academics. Both people working in or associated with the media will benefit from his insights, as will anyone with a concern for the

world of ideas. For this group, The Marketplace of Attention will shed light on how digital technologies influence popular culture and the public discourse. There are many startling statistics about the growth of digital media: 500 million tweets are sent each day; 100 million hours of new YouTube videos are uploaded every minute; the number of words written each day are enough to fill all the books in the US Library of Congress; and worldwide, advertisers spend roughly \$500b a year to reach an audience. New media, and the audiences it gathers, has always generated concern. In the fourth century BCE, Plato worried that the "new" technology of writing would "encourage forgetfulness and weaken people's minds." Early in the twentieth century, thoughtful people worried that film and radio would "manipulate the passions and opinions of gullible mass publics." Our era has its own set of concerns, and it is useful to know that mankind dealt successfully with the others, and will do so again. Until recently media content was connected to specific modes of distribution. If you wished to see a movie you went to the cinema; you bought your news from a newspaper seller on your way to or from work, or had it delivered. To watch TV, you went home and waited for the broadcast. Digital media in stark contrast, is not limited by time or place. It offers people innumerable ways to consume it, and to do this at the time of their choosing. All creators of media want attention. They want attention to "amuse, build social capital, make money, or change the course of human events," Professor Webster notes. One of the many reasons that makes grabbing attention difficult, is that people's attention is limited. There are only so many hours in the day and it is a zero-sum game: if one thing wins attention another cannot. The result is that much of the tsunami of media content, is doomed to obscurity. There are many reasons why understanding what changes public attention is more important now than it has ever been. With important events dominating our thinking and discussion both here in South Africa, and in the most powerful country in the history of the world, the US, understanding what we hear, and do not hear, is profoundly significant. For instance, how does the abundance of digital media affect how people are informed and make decisions? It is so easy now to avoid what you dislike and to "retreat into enclaves of comfortable, like-minded speech," Webster points out. "Complex findings do not cater to punchy headlines and thus seldom receive the same level of attention as apocalyptic warnings." That which is simplified into a headline can easily be misunderstood as characterizing the whole issue. In the past, if an idea was on a broadcast network, it reached a mass audience because all people had the same limited options. The digital world has changed all this. The marketplace of attention is a highly structured world, and Professor Webster offers a useful and accessible theoretical framework for explaining how it works. The interplay of media and audiences generally does not have a simple, one-directional explanation. Is a website popular because Google recommends it, or does Google recommend it because it's popular? Additionally, everyone's media choices are influenced by their social networks, the many groups people belong to: family, friends, social or business organizations. Often these groups will have an "opinion leader" who is active in directing members' attention to some things and not others. What messages get through to people is compounded by the volume of digital media, and how our attention does not go from the front page of the newspaper we purchased, to the last. If it did we would be following one media house's views on everything from politics, to the economy, to social values, and even what is defined as news. Thought structures are a force to be reckoned with. Some of these structures, social or media, are obvious and others are not; some are closed to a variety of different ideas, and other are open. For example, people who are politically conservative might succeed in connecting only with other like-minded conservative people, and consume conservative content. This could move them to ever-more extreme positions fuelling "echo chambers" where they hear only their own voices. This leads to "group polarization" where they meet only other politically conservative people. Where systems are open, they encourage the crosscutting meeting of ideas, have the potential to limit "echo chamber" downward spirals, and might even promote more robust, public debate. Thought structures can be obvious or concealed. Most Thought structures can be obvious or concealed., and so turn to them more naturally. Concealed structures, however, work behind the scenes. Users may have no idea that they are operating within a structured environment. English speakers mainly use English speaking sites, not Chinese ones and so are limited to a western view of the world. We use recommendations, for example, "the top ten phones of 2016", where the criteria of choice of the top 10 is far less clear, despite the impression that we are exposing ourselves to choice. In the early 1970s, Nobel laureate Herbert Simon famously observed, "a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it." We are swamped by media and it affects our thought processes, decisions and judgment. The more we know about media, the better. This book is very helpful in that regard. Readability Light ---+ Serious Insights High +---- Low Practical High ----+ Low\* Ian Mann of Gateways consults internationally on leadership and strategy and is the author of Strategy that Works. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. If you know the bias, the book will help. By vittorio veltroni Very good and full of interesting insights, the book is a little bit biased but nevertheless interesting. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This book is equally useful for those who are interested in media studies. By Elena This book is equally useful for those who are interested in media studies, political science, sociology, journalism, as well as for people outside of academia. Unlike some academic prose, the text is well-written, lucid, and a pleasure to read. Webster, who has an impressive academic background, and is a go-to person when it comes to media

audiences, offers a comprehensive analysis of relations between the viewers/consumers and the mass media in the digital era. He discusses a variety of factors that affect the way we choose what to watch and read, and formulates the concept of the "marketplace of attention:" in today's world of limitless choices of media products, the only thing that is truly limited is our attention. Who, how, and why is going to get it? If these are the questions that you are interested in, the book offers some very convincing answers.

Feature films, television shows, homemade videos, tweets, blogs, and breaking news: digital media offer an always-accessible, apparently inexhaustible supply of entertainment and information. Although choices seems endless, public attention is not. How do digital media find the audiences they need in an era of infinite choice? In *The Marketplace of Attention*, James Webster explains how audiences take shape in the digital age. Webster describes the factors that create audiences, including the preferences and habits of media users, the role of social networks, the resources and strategies of media providers, and the growing impact of media measures -- from ratings to user recommendations. He incorporates these factors into one comprehensive framework: the marketplace of attention. In doing so, he shows that the marketplace works in ways that belie our greatest hopes and fears about digital media. Some observers claim that digital media empower a new participatory culture; others fear that digital media encourage users to retreat to isolated enclaves. Webster shows that public attention is at once diverse and concentrated -- that users move across a variety of outlets, producing high levels of audience overlap. So although audiences are fragmented in ways that would astonish midcentury broadcasting executives, Webster argues that this doesn't signal polarization. He questions whether our preferences are immune from media influence, and he describes how our encounters with media might change our tastes. In the digital era's marketplace of attention, Webster claims, we typically encounter ideas that cut across our predispositions. In the process, we will remake the marketplace of ideas and reshape the twenty-first century public sphere.

Scholarly discussions of audiences are as fragmented as the readers and viewers they analyze. Theories of selective exposure, bubbles, preference formation, rational ignorance, uses and gratification, scheduling patterns, and counter-programming all vie for attention. This book skillfully draws these theories and evidence together to answer a simple but vexing question: how much do we know about how audiences are generated, and what does that imply about the marketplace of ideas? (James T. Hamilton, Hearst Professor of Communication, Stanford University) A thorough and thought-provoking primer on how the interplay of users and structures affects the creation of audiences that are neither as participatory nor as polarized as some digital theorists have imagined. (Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania) Webster provides an astute explanation of how the transformation from a media world with limited choice to one of bountiful supply is affecting audiences, media, and society. He focuses on how individuals exercise personal choice and create discrete consumption patterns, and what is now required to garner their attention. He shows that traditional conceptualizations of audiences are no longer expedient and argues for a new understanding of how audience and social needs can be evaluated and met. This is an important book for understanding media audiences and behavior. (Robert G. Picard, Director of Research, Reuters Institute, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford) An engaging, coolheaded look at the changing media landscape. There have been many breathless accounts of how new media might be changing the world, predicting we are on the verge of either utopia or disaster. Webster pulls together hard evidence and frontier research to tell us what actually is happening, cutting through the hyperbole and offering a balanced account of where we have been and where we are going. (Matthew Gentzkow, Richard O. Ryan Professor of Economics, University of Chicago Booth School of Business) *The Marketplace of Attention* is a worthy addition to cross-disciplinary shelves. It's lucid, accessible and thoughtful -- and in our fast-moving media market, who can ask for more than that? (Times Higher Education) James G. Webster makes important theoretical contributions in this book that will inform a wealth of testable hypotheses about audience choice and the influence of messages in a fragmented, segmented, media environment. His principal contribution may be his cool-headed yet provocative approach. Webster at once offers an exciting characterization of a dynamic marketplace of attention as well as a careful check on theorists and empiricists making broad claims about the dire consequences of media choice or micro-targeting. (The International Journal of Press/Politics) About the Author James G. Webster is Professor in the School of Communication at Northwestern University. *The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age*