

REVIEW:

In The Digital Engagement Model, Ronald Yaros tackles one of the most persistent challenges of our time: how to hold human attention in a fragmented digital world. Drawing from decades of research in communication, cognitive science, human–computer interaction, and information theory, Yaros argues that understanding engagement today requires moving beyond writing or design craft alone. Instead, he offers a model grounded in how people actually perceive, process, and respond to information across devices and platforms.

Yaros’s approach is both ambitious and interdisciplinary. He synthesizes a wide range of research on cognition, selective exposure, motivation, and attention into a cohesive framework that he calls the Digital Engagement Model (DEM). The model proposes that effective digital content should adapt dynamically to the user’s context, time, and cognitive state. It’s a vision that challenges the conventions of how journalists, educators, and communicators still tend to structure information -- particularly in linear, text-heavy formats.

The book’s strongest contribution is its insistence that engagement is not a monolith. Yaros delineates cognitive, emotional, and interactive dimensions of engagement and makes a compelling case that audience “attention” cannot be reduced to clicks or pageviews. He also demonstrates unusual empathy for the realities of producers working under pressure, e.g., newsrooms, teachers, and communicators who need tools that make their content not just findable but meaningful. His “Digital DIET” (demographics, interest, environment, time) and “SPICE” (scannable, personalized, interactive, curiosity-driven, emotional) frameworks translate complex theory into memorable, practical terms.

The Digital Engagement Model will most appeal to readers who value theory-building and are willing to think beyond the current vocabulary of “audience development” or “engagement metrics.” Even for those who may not fully subscribe to the model’s theoretical architecture, the book succeeds in pushing the field toward a richer understanding of how people actually consume (and ignore) digital content.

For scholars, Yaros provides a comprehensive synthesis of research that has too often been siloed. For practitioners, he offers a provocative reminder: the medium isn’t just the message, it’s the cognitive interface between the human brain and a sea of information.

This book reflects Ron Yaros’s long-standing commitment to bridging science and practice in digital communication. It’s an earnest and rigorous contribution to the ongoing conversation about how journalism and media can better serve distracted publics in a complex, digital environment.

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