

Book Review

Digital Sociology

Deborah Lupton, Taylor and Francis

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“Digital Sociology” by Deborah Lupton (2015) is an extremely fascinating book of recent times when the presence of digitization and digital technologies is all-pervasive. Since the inception of the day, we all have been hooked on the scroll. The overwhelming presence of social media has shaped our lives in a plethora of ways. Divided into 9 chapters, the book starts with a brief introduction to digital life. Then goes on to the theoretical underpinning of digital society. One gets to learn about the impact of such massive digitization on academics as well. Political activism and public engagement in politics have got a new lease of life after the mushrooming of digital media.

The advent of computers and digital technologies has completely revolutionized various dimensions of our lives in a great number of ways. Now digital devices like smartphones and computers have become an intricate part of our selves. It has resulted in quick accessibility of information and revamped the process of communication in manifold ways. We are now reduced to mere ‘data subjects’ where our daily interactions and activities are recorded and stored by different agencies such as through banking interactions, online shopping sites or government agencies. The recommendation of content that one comes across the social media feed is most likely to be of interest of that particular user. It happens so because social media keeps tabs and records a lot of features about its users.

This book has opened a new horizon for sociological research into the field of computer technologies which was hitherto missing in this field. The first chapter titled, ‘Theorising Digital Society’ deals with the dominant theoretical perspectives within this field. In this age of information, where we are almost bombarded with information the moment we open our digital devices, such ‘digitally mediated information’ (Lupton 2015) has an overwhelming influence on economic productivity as well. The production and distribution of knowledge have undergone significant changes owing to the mega digital platforms which are dominating the digital world currently. Akin to the Foucauldian approach to power, this approach doesn’t believe in the concentration of power in just one source, rather it is dispersed across multiple sources. Another dominant theory is ‘digital technologies and data as socio-material objects’. This focus on the unique interaction between human and non-human actors termed as ‘Internet of Things’. The third one being the ‘Prosumption, neoliberalism and sharing subject’. There are myriad of content creators and users

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across the social media platforms, each using the digital technologies for communicating or simply upgrading themselves by learning new things. The very concept of atomised self completely in charge of one's destiny is further reinforced by this world of digitization.

Sharing subjects is the most crucial aspect of social media and so is the archiving and recording of data. Digital surveillance is the hallmark of social media where all our interactions and activities in this space are monitored and kept under strict vigil. The data shared by millions of users is being recorded and monitored by a variety of agencies. This is closely akin to Foucault's concept of panopticon as depicted in his book, "Discipline and Punish" (1995).

The second chapter deals with 'Reconceptualising research in the digital era'. The traditional, conventional methods of research are now relegated to the background. Besides its multiple advantages, the author has mentioned its inherent limitations as well. The next chapter is about 'The digitised academic' or the profound impact of massive digitization on education. Digitization has opened up new horizons for academicians where they can easily share their research findings with fellow scholars and connect with the ones doing research on similar fields. There are tons of resources made accessible nowadays across platforms which now can be used for academic and research purposes. But this has a façade as well. Sometimes the online personas of the academicians are deceptive and are mostly controlled by others and have rare resemblance with the original ones. Digital technologies have ushered in new forms of publishing but each one of those comes with their pros and cons as well.

The following chapter on 'A Critical Sociology of Big Data' elucidates the meaning of big data and the current obsession of replacing the traditional ones with this new type of data. The use of big data has some serious ethical and political implications which have been discussed at length.

The chapter on 'The diversity of digital technology use' shows the persisting divide between the ones who have access to technology while some who don't. Even individuals across social groups vary significantly in terms of their perception with regard to the use of digital media.

The chapter on 'Digital Politics and Citizen Digital Public Engagement' talks about the increased surveillance enforced by law enforcement agencies across social media. Digital activism is on the rise owing to the use of technologies. A critical analysis is given at the fag end of the chapter where the author have tried to analyse if at all this increased activism is effective in the truest sense of the term or not.

In the last chapter, the very concept of self is analysed which has undergone a lot of changes and redefined in terms of its intricate relationship with digital media. The author brings in the concept of a cyborg.

Social media and digital technologies are like a double-edged sword. Just like its plethora of advantages, it has numerous deadly traps as well. The author has skilfully elaborated on the sociological aspect of digital media. But he hasn't much covered the alternative to it. The way we all are getting dependent and addicted to

the media is uncanny and sociologists must find a way to reverse this condition else the time is not far when humans would be turned into mere humanoids.