Palgrave Handbook of Digital Everyday Life

Foreword

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Everyday life in the title of this volume signals an important emphasis on how people experience their digitally mediated lives. This is in contrast to discussions in both the global North and South on the expected impacts of investment in digital technologies and services on economies with accompanying forecasts of how all countries will benefit from adopting the latest technology infrastructures and access to the big tech company platforms and their services. Following in the critical research tradition on digitalisation and datafication where there are many concerns about the proliferating monetisation of individuals' data with little or no regard for their fundamental rights, the first special feature of this volume is its shift of analytical focus away from a neoliberal view. In this view, individuals are treated simply as agents who are assumed to express their demand in a market where big tech companies respond by supplying social media, audiovisual and other digital commercial services. In this volume, individuals are contextualised – they have agency but they are also subject to powerful corporate, and often state, pressures aimed at shaping their behaviours. The second special feature is a focus on individual and group experiences in the broader context of the their everyday experiences and their capacities to embrace or resist the digital technologies on offer.

In focusing on everyday life, this collection calls attention to how media and communication technologies are interwoven with the fabric of the everyday – with routines, rituals and behaviours. This approach signposts what comes to be normalised culturally, socially, politically and economically when people are immersed in a digital ecology; an ecology that comes with specific affordances and implications for people's social, cultural, political and working lives.

In this volume, the authors do not treat digital technologies as being 'out there'. Instead, they examine how these technologies are implicated in people's 'ways of operating' as Michel de Certeau might have put it. They illustrate the many everyday practices through which digital technology users can shape or reappropriate digital technologies in their own interests, instead of in the interests of often distant providers of digital platforms and services. The authors acknowledge the multiple harms and sometimes alienating conditions of digitally mediated everyday life, but they

also look to the potentials if new practices can be put in place and if governments are able to introduce policies and regulations that curtail harmful practices.

While the companies and governments that are investing in artificial intelligence and the algorithms that increasingly monitor and govern the lives of people in the global South and North exert their power and hegemony through overt and covert (nudging) strategies and practices, the contributors to this volume refreshingly draw attention to the fact that digital dominance is not uniformly experienced. Many chapters highlight resistance strategies and everyday tactics. Instead of focusing exclusively on what the digital world does to people, the great strength of this collection is its focus on what people do with or make of the digital world and how they go about changing it – under circumstances given in the global South which provide the empirical content of the chapters.

When digital technologies are not contributing to more equitable societies, the challenge for researchers is to uncover why this is so and what can be done about it. Even as technology designers and business strategists contain and constrain people's behaviour in multiple ways, it is crucial to reveal and protect local ways of 'knowing' or indigenous epistemologies as Sohail Inayatullah might argue. As the authors show, insights can then be deployed as a means of countering exploitative visions and practices associated with a commercially datafied future.

The contributors to this volume also acknowledge that access to, and participation in, a system of mediated digital communication is becoming a precondition for full participation in society. If the distribution of access is unfair, action is needed. Values, actions, interests, and constraints all need to be revealed through empirical study. When the prevailing digital services business models operate by surveilling individuals when they go online, the implications are felt by all – in the labour force, in education, in social service, and in the media. In this sense, the relations of digital production and consumption are always political, and they are often discriminatory.

Structuring this collection around five themes - Social Media and Digital Lifeworlds; Digital Affordances and Contestations; Digital Divides and Inclusion Strategies; Work, Culture and Digital Consumption; and New Media and Digital Journalism, the opportunities, but also the exclusions and harms, linked to digital technologies are addressed. The reader will find insight into the varying types of platform architectures or 'grammars of action', following Philip Agre, that influence the way digital platforms shape cultural, social and political norms. The reader will also find chapters which

critique the always persistent discourse about digital transformation as if it is necessarily universally beneficial for all.

Attention is given in this volume to developments in artificial intelligence that are infusing societies, conditioning ways of interpreting and acting in the world. The chapters illustrate how digital technologies are enabling the pervasive monetization of data and how both adults and children manage to navigate their everyday lives, their socialisation, their identities, and their access to education as well as their jobs and their increasingly precarious working lives.

Several chapters focus on how digital systems provided by big tech companies – especially in response to the Covid-19 pandemic - have influenced data collection and led to new forms and intensities of population surveillance. Also highlighted are pressures to adopt new forms of working in paid employment, new approaches to humanitarian responses to crises, and novel strategies to sustain local industries such as tourism. The authors show how new practices of governance have been introduced from above and that sometimes they can be resisted from below. They highlight creative and beneficial adaptations to a changing digital ecology such as the introduction of robots or the gamification of work tasks, but, importantly, they do not neglect maladaptive outcomes which mean that workers and volunteers face new pressures to perform more efficiently. In all these instances, the authors emphasise the need for digital technology applications to be designed and implemented consistent with the contexts in which they are applied and with human well-being.

Importantly, the authors stress the way digital apps and social media may be empowering for some, but lead to risks and harms that are incompatible with people's rights to safety and to live in a just world. From abusive online communication about intimate relationships to cybercrime and mis or disinformation, as well as the changing, often idealised, representations of cities online, the contributors demonstrate how their digital ecologies are producing new inequalities and perpetuating existing societal injustices, both for the excluded and disadvantaged, and for the included. Everyday lives are increasingly also mediated by digital journalism which is implicated in representing a close and distant world. Several chapters emphasise how mainstream journalism tends to marginalise certain perspectives on issues like climate change, the need to consider what public service journalism can mean when it is owned and operated by the state, and whether alternative modes of critical journalistic practice are feasible in the face of persistent underfunding.

In this volume, the contributors do not set out simply to describe a changing digital landscape. Also addressed is what can be done to achieved radical change. Several chapters highlight the need to enhance individual and collective agency and responsibility, to engage in activism through involving children in the design and development of digital services, to use digital resources to support local or regional languages, and to develop trusted digital services to support local and national economic activities. They also highlight strategies of formal governance such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the need for governments to introduce digital strategies that aim to indigenize digitalisation agendas.

Just as Roger Silverstone's work on the everyday life experience of digital technologies emphasised attending to both the over- and under-determination of relationships involved in the development and use of innovative digital technologies, the contributors to this volume succeed in demonstrating that digitally-infused everyday lives are both historically situated and contingent upon institutional forces and individual actions. This dialectic creates ambiguity in the outcomes of digitalisation and the exercise of power from below and from above. From above, as Shoshana Zuboff argues, in today's digital environments 'illegitimate knowledge' is being transformed into 'illegitimate power'. From below, this volume succeeds in demonstrating that options for resistance exist and that, through action, opportunities can be created for mitigating the harms of digitalisation and, in some instances, bringing the benefits of digitalisation into the experience of people's everyday lives. In short, this book may be about digital technologies, but its focus on the everyday means that is – as it should be – principally about 'the conceptions, interests and ideals from which human ways of treating one another spring, and the systems of value on which such ends of life are based'.[1]

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[1] Berlin, I. (1959/2003) *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. London: Random House, p. 1.