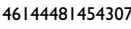
Book Reviews

new media & society
2014, Vol. 16(7) 1185–1194

DOI: 10.1177/1461444814543078
nms.sagepub.com



Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The new social operating system*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2012; xiii + 358 pp.: ISBN 9780868017190, $29.95 (hbk)

Reviewed by: Alexander Halavais, *Arizona State University, USA*

Imagine needing to direct a student or colleague toward a broad introduction to the ways in which network-mediated society is undergoing change. That such a change is underway, and the broad dimensions of the shift, is probably familiar ground to the readers of *New Media & Society*, but a relatively straightforward and concise presentation is not easy to find. If you also want this introduction to network-mediated society to be well grounded in empirical observation and social theory, you would have been out of luck until the publication of Rainie and Wellman's *Networked: The New Social Operating System.*

To situate *Networked*, it might be useful to compare it to some of the other possibilities. Sherry Turkle, Eli Pariser, Nicholas Carr and Evgeny Morozov, among others, provide accessible book-length critiques of networked society. A number of popular books like those by Howard Rheingold, Clay Shirky and David Weinberger draw together engaging narratives that paint a fairly rosy picture of the potential of new information technologies. Some authors, like Manual Castells or Armand and Michèle Mattelart, have created broad overviews of how networks affect us socially. But it is difficult to find a work that provides a balanced description of the changes in our everyday lives encouraged by new networked and mobile technology and establishes a foundation for further exploration.

The central argument of the book is that we are in the midst of a 'triple revolution' (p. 11) brought about by social networks, the internet and mobile technologies. More specifically, the book seeks to draw out the concept of 'networked individualism' (p. 12) – people connecting as individuals rather than working in groups – that Wellman and his colleagues have engaged as a model earlier published work, and aims to present many of the rhythms of everyday social life through this lens. Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is making clear this break from thinking about interactions through institutions, classes or social groups and toward more networked relations. A second strength is the collection of evidence they bring to bear, largely from work done by the Pew Internet and American Life project and at the University of Toronto's NetLab.

Having described these broad social changes, and illustrated them both with quantitative data and through stories of networked individuals, the authors (with contributions from their colleagues) go on to discuss how these changes play out in a variety of contexts: interpersonal relationships, families, working environments, and the creation and consumption of media and information. Naturally, given breadth of contexts in which they deploy the perspective of networked individualism, it is difficult to reach great depth. But as an orienting perspective, drawing together what is now decades of research, it provides an outstanding map of the territory. In the final two chapters of the book, Rainie and Wellman attempt to provide both advice to the aspiring successfully networked individual, and map out future possibilities for social change. They both provide such a long list of potential possibilities that it is impossible to believe the advice or predictions could ever be entirely wrong.

The authors strike a good balance between rigour and accessibility. I would not hesitate to assign this work to undergraduates in introductory courses. Yet, even as someone already familiar with many of the concepts presented, I found new and useful information and ideas. Rainie and Wellman manage to present these changes as cautiously positive and back this position up with a wealth of evidence.

Perhaps the best kind of criticism of a work is to want more, and I found myself in that position when reading *Networked*. In particular, I enjoyed the engagement with networked individualism as more than just a category of work or a perspective, but as a larger approach to drawing out a social theory, pulling from Simmel and Mauss to weave an idea about how social life is best understood. This is a rich vein, and I found myself wishing that the theoretical questions had been engaged more thoroughly. Certainly, some of that belongs in another book, one that might assume a basic grounding in social theory and draw networked individualism into longstanding sociological debates about units of analysis, the individual and the society, and the place of agency. But even in a work that is pitched to those who may be less prepared for such larger arguments, a more conceptual take would have been appreciated. I found, for example, the discussion of privacy and how various 'veillances' (pp. 235–243) especially intriguing, particularly given how they described Google's problem with the Buzz incident (p. 36). In the case of this incident, users were surprised by the collapse of their social circles; the example provides a particularly useful way of interrogating some of the theoretical concerns of networked individualism. The authors return to questions of privacy in the final chapter, to present alternative views of future surveillance societies. While evocative, the discussion only scratches the surface of the theoretical implications of privacy and knowledge to networked social structures, and at times, I wished the authors connected these changes in everyday social relationships to broader questions about how new networked social capital changes what we think we know about society as a whole.

A second concern is the question of whether networked individualism is a model through which we observe society, or is a new form of social structure. I think the authors would agree it is both, but it is not always clear where social networks as a method, networked individualism as a model, and social networking systems as socio-technical systems intersect. I have little doubt that the authors have a clear idea of how these are parsed, but to this reader, the presentation was a bit confusing in the early chapters, and

seemed to conflate the methods and models of sociological inquiry with the concrete changes underway.

Both of these criticisms lend themselves well to classroom discussion, where this is used as a course text. Moreover, they represent only modest criticisms of a book that I think manages to do the impossible rather well: providing a strong foundation for thinking about networked society that is not dated 2 years after issue, and I suspect will continue to be marked as a contribution to understanding the networked society for some time to come. There are other paths to the study of this area, drawing on different methodological and epistemological traditions, but I have little doubt that those who come to this area through Rainie and Wellman's book will be well prepared to engage the literature as a whole and will see the networked world in a different light.

Hassan Masum and Mark Tovey (eds), *The reputation society: How online opinions are reshaping the offline world*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2011; xi + 220 pp.: ISBN 9780262016643, $28.00 (hbk)

Reviewed by: Sonja Utz, *Knowledge Media Research Center, Germany*

We rely more and more on reputation systems when making decisions: the score of an eBay seller, the rating of a hotel on TripAdvisor, or the reviews of a book on Amazon. As Craig Newman, the founder of Craigslist, states in the foreword of the anthology, trust and reputation will become more important than money and nominal power (p. ix). After this strong claim, reputation is examined in a wide variety of contexts and from different perspectives in the next six sections. The collection goes beyond the well-known examples such as eBay, Amazon and Yelp, and addresses also academic impact factors or less known reputation systems such as the Whuffie. Part I, *Understanding Reputation*, comprises of three chapters that define the field. Chrysanthos Dellarocas, for example, gives a short and clear introduction in central questions of reputation system design, pointing also to the negative sides. Part II, *Regulation Societies*, focuses mainly on the regulation of reputation systems, taking examples from biology (John Whitfield), the secondary and tertiary invisible hands at the marketplace (Eric Goldman), or the landlord–tenant relation (Lior Jacob Stahilevitz). Together, the three chapters show not only how reputation can solve problems, but also point to mistakes in designing or regulating reputation systems. Part III is titled *Amplifying Signals*, but it focuses mainly on the role of reputation systems in stimulating good behaviour – in online communities – but also philanthropy. Part IV, *Supporting Science*, discusses the benefits of usage-based metrics above simple citation scores in science. In part V, *Improving Policy*, the attention goes to societal problems such as citizen engagement. Part VI, *The Reputation Society*, closes the volume with three utopian, more pessimistic chapters. Whereas Michael Zimmer and Anthony Hoffman address the issue of privacy and the dangers of oversharing in social media as a reputational challenge, Jamais Cascio, and also Madeline Ashby and Cory Doctorow provide intriguing, but somewhat scary, scenarios about the future reputation society.

As can be seen in this overview, the book touches reputation in many domains. It is also written by an interesting mix of authors. Many are academics, but there are also