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Digital Citizenship in a Datafied Society

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IJIDI: Book Review

Hintz, A., Dencik, L., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2019). *Digital citizenship in a datafied society*. Polity. ISBN 9781509527199. 194 pp. \$22.95 US.

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As citizens, we are entitled to learn how our digital footprint impacts our digital life. Digital citizenship involves communication and collaboration within a social and political environment. There are two types of citizens: those who are active, and those who are passive active; both of which form part of how the overall concept of citizenship is understood today. Moreover, digital citizenship is evolving to keep up with the diverse ways we engage online. The focus is on privacy, security, and how these areas affect the way users access digital tools and platforms.

Digital Citizenship in a Datafied Society examines the foundations of digital citizenship and how it relates to our digital world and the society in which we live. The book attempts to answer an important question: How can we understand citizenship in an age of data collection and processing? According to the authors, digital citizenship is understood as the rights and obligations in relation to a nation-state, performative enactment facing challenges in a context marked by data-based profiling and new forms of social sorting. Power, agency, and control are prominent topics discussed throughout this book, noting prominent notions of digital citizenship related to data collection infrastructures. Datafication is a way to generate new possibilities for citizen actions revolving digital citizenship, because digital citizenship is not only self-constructed but also self-defined and equally constructed by government and businesses (p. 36).

This text reviews contemporary debates throughout various disciplines and draws from the authors' empirical research which was funded by the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council. Overall, the book's premise is based on the "Snowden Movement" as a centerpiece to describe the historic juncture beginning with the emergence of our "datafied society" and the start of the debate around the challenges and implications we see as a result of living in this type of society. This book paves the way into societal transformations which invite the rethinking of the foundations of citizenship and how they shape us at a personal level as well as on the state corporate political level.

Throughout this book, there are several reoccurring terms that are used to explain the evolution of digital citizenship and what it means to live in a "datafied society". The authors introduce the readers to such concepts as "active citizenship," "datafication," and "the datafied social world."

"Active citizenship" refers to active involvement in society, whether it is through politics or the social environment. It is defined through identifying the themes and trends in citizenship studies

that involve contemporary issues such as privacy, security, and affairs of gender, race, and class.

The datafied social world is described as the world we live in and it is identified as an abstraction of citizens where our lived experiences create new grounds for new data policies that lead to new data politics.

Data ethics, a prevalent theme in the book, is described as the branch of ethics which studies and evaluates moral problems related to data, algorithms, and practices. Data ethics provides a framework for society to target ethical challenges, specifically to those related to risk for privacy breaches, discrimination and abuse, lack of trust, reliability, and transparency.

Data surveillance is defined when describing the “The Snowden Leaks Movement,” and is broken down by providing basic examples of what digital data surveillance is. The authors often use this term to define the relationship between digital technology and surveillance to better convey how the structures and agency of information are changing since the occurrence of the Snowden Leaks.

These terms help introduce the reader to several aspects of critical data studies. Furthermore, the use of these terms invites discussion about how data is perceived, managed, and manipulated. Misuse of privileged access to confidential information is becoming commonplace. Data can be easily manipulated, as well as analyzed to produce other sources that are transformed in a way that is different than what it was originally intended for. Throughout this book, the authors discuss the Edward Snowden revelations as an example of how all data is vulnerable.

This title directly addresses diversity and inclusion. For example, when it comes to interpreting citizen’s digital power, the authors thoroughly go over the concerns associated with modern data surveillance, and take into consideration the effects of historical biases as well as provide correlations to the privacy of user’s data in an effort to educate and help diminish the possibility for discriminatory outcomes that are the result of biased-faulty algorithms. Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen discuss what it is to experience “inequality of legibility,” in that while digital power creates a space for political activities to take place, there is the advantage that digital power offers legibility to those looking for information. This is due to a prominent concern associated with how data systems are set to incorporate historical biases that happen through something the authors label as an “algorithmic bias.” The algorithmic bias happens due to system errors, meaning the content programmed is inaccurate and inappropriate. What is clear is that systemic and unconscious biases in the human world are reflected in the systems created by biased humans and that this “bad data” needs to be addressed.

After reading *Digital Citizenship in a Datafied Society* I learned that we need to maintain our focus on the current state of the digital era. This book provides an overview of the social, political, and diverse discursive contexts of digital citizenship and documents how our digital economy has changed a large part of our life through social media. Throughout this book, Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen introduce various frameworks that affect data and how it is collected from us for later use and analysis. Readers are introduced early in the text on how the term “datafication” is reflected in, and maintained through, media coverage; specifically, how it relates to citizen’s knowledge and understanding of mass data collection; and possibilities for dissent and resistance.

The book suggests that the understandings of digital citizenship require significant review and that key principles of the concepts need substantial revision. The authors propose a new perspective on digital citizenship that takes the processes and practices of “datafication” into account. The book covers the history of data surveillance studies and explains how the practices of surveillance studies and critical data studies are closely connected to normalization, policymaking, technological standards, and how it influences the media, citizens and activists in this type of discourse.

I recommend this book—ideally for readers who are academics, researchers, and library practitioners—as a valuable resource depicting how our digital society has changed over time. This book fits within the LIS/diversity researcher/librarian practitioner literature specifically because it documents the advent of digital citizenship and the effects of datafication on society by using “Snowden Leaks” as a significant event that changed the research lens for critical data studies, information ethics, and data surveillance. The authors provide a multifaceted explanation based on the extensive research conducted by a great number of scholars on the emerging context of datafication and the implications for society and citizenship.

Overall, anyone interested in reading about critical data studies and the datafication of society and citizenship would benefit from reading this book. The authors thoroughly cover the main concern with digital citizenship: the disregard for the arbiters of our data and governance. The intended audiences for this book are those seeking to find a multidisciplinary perspective on the intersection of equity, social justice, and information specifically because the authors take on various angles on how the Snowden movement integrated and implicated the modes of governance. This was done by documenting the data that is collected through digital technologies and how they are commonly used by people.

This book is also of relevance to international readers because the topics relating to digital citizenship affect everyone on a global level. Although countries may have different information ethics and processes, the authors cover a movement that changed the way citizen data is controlled on a universal level.

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