BOOK REVIEW

Networked:
The New Social Operating System

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Networked: The New Social Operating System
Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman
©2012 by The MIT Press
358 pp.
$29.95

This book by Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman aims to show how the large, loosely knit social circles of networked individuals expand opportunities for learning, problem solving, decision making, and personal interaction. It does this quite successfully, through providing a strong introduction to the authors’ research specialism of networked individualism. The purpose of the book appears to be to consolidate over 30 years’ of research on networked individualism into one volume, which makes it easier for people getting to grips with online social networking to understand this important yet abstract area. Even so, one might still ask whether it is worth buying a whole book dedicated to a concept with a very narrow research base beyond that of the authors. This review might provide the answer.

The book is made up of 11 chapters split into three sections. Organisationally it is very well assembled. Each section has a chapter linking it to the next, which although helpful, raises the question whether this should have been an inbuilt feature. The authors discuss in the introduction whether they should have named the book ‘Networked Individualism’, saying that this would confuse readers who might not know what it means. But to anyone who has followed the authors’ extensive works on the subject previously, it would probably have made more sense to have done so, if only to differentiate it from the more technological books on the market implied in the title. The book follows an interesting and well documented biographical account of the lives of online community moderators, Peter and Trudy Johnson-Lenz, who first appeared in Wellman’s work in the 1990s (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). This provides consistency in terms of making the examples given easy to relate to, yet one can’t help but feel that it is not in keeping with the era of “YOU” conceptualised by Time Magazine. With the very nature of networked individualism being about the joining of different people across different frontiers, first spoken about by David Kemp in his three-decades long study of electoral behaviour and social mobility in Australia (Kemp, 1978), most would have

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