



Book reviews

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Zizi Papacharissi (ed.), *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*.
New York: Routledge, 2011. viii + 328 pp. ISBN 9780415801812, \$41.95 (pbk)

Reviewed by: Kris M. Markman, *University of Memphis, USA*

By the end of 2011, the Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that 65 percent of adult internet users in the United States had used at least one social network site (SNS), a figure that represented half of all adults in the country (Madden and Zickuhr, 2011). And while younger adults continued to dominate in SNS usage, usage by adults over 50 has continued to grow. The last five years have seen an explosive growth in the adoption of SNSs, and a concomitant increase in research on the subject. The pieces collected in *A Networked Self* provide a snapshot of the current trends in this research, with a particular focus on the ways in which SNS usage is becoming increasingly interwoven with our social lives.

The volume is organized with an introduction, three thematic sections, and a conclusion. However, the introduction in this case consists of the keynote address by Albert-László Barabási given to the Networked Self Conference held at the University of Illinois Chicago in 2009, and on which this book is based. The result is a somewhat non-traditional introduction, as Barabási does not introduce the goal of the book and the organization of the chapters, but rather gives readers a grounding in network science, and specifically shows the similarities between human social networks and other biological and technical networks. The benefit of this approach is that it allows readers to discover points of connection among the various chapters themselves, without the voice of the editor interceding. However, this approach also makes it more difficult for readers to choose specific chapters to focus on, which is often how such anthologies are used. Editor Zizi Papacharissi's conclusion to the volume provides the connective observations and definitions of key terms that are frequently found in the introduction.

The remainder of the book is organized around three sections of loosely related chapters. In Part I, readers are presented with several different theoretical approaches to studying SNS usage. Joseph Walther and colleagues present a compelling argument for the need for a convergent approach to the traditionally separate theories that examine interpersonal, mass, and peer communication, noting that the architecture of SNSs and the practices that users engage in regularly blur these lines. Similarly, danah boyd's discussion of SNSs as a genre of networked publics highlights the tensions between public and private displays and the contributions of SNS architecture to these issues. The importance

of architecture is also clear in Marc Andrejevic's critical examination of the commercial exploitation of the 'free' labor of SNS profile creation.

The focus of Part II is on emerging patterns of sociability, which Papacharissi defines as 'the ability to perform the social behaviors that lead to sociality', where 'sociality refers to the sum of social behaviors that permit the individual to traverse from the state of individuality to that of sociality and fellowship' (p. 316). Accordingly, topics addressed in this section include the development of online communities and social capital through interaction in SNSs, a typology of SNS usage, and the possibilities for the use of SNS to solve issues of knowledge management in the workplace. Part III focuses on convergent practices, including two chapters that specifically examine the role of SNS usage for political information. Thomas Johnson and colleagues point out that while YouTube fits the traditional definition of a SNS, it can also serve as a site for more traditional media consumption, absent of any profile creation or networking interaction, and their contribution discusses a study comparing the use of YouTube with other SNSs for civic engagement. Similarly, Barbara Kaye compares SNS users and blog readers, with a focus on the motivations for using these different sites for political information. Other convergent practices discussed in this section include several chapters focusing on identity performance and a discussion of the potential for artificial agents to become actors in social networks.

There are a number of positive features of this collection. Although the majority of the chapters present the results of empirical work, the inclusion of several theory pieces gives the volume some balance, as does the mix of critical and social scientific approaches represented. In addition, there are a number of interesting ways that different chapters can be read together to form a larger meta-commentary on the issues at hand. For example, reading the chapter by Marc Andrejevic on the surveillant properties of SNSs and the potential for the exploitation of voluntary labor against the chapters by Mary Beth Watson-Manheim on communication repertoires and the potential uses of SNSs at work, and Dawn Gilpin on the use of Twitter by public relations professionals, creates a dialogue on the nature of work in a networked age and the possible benefits and drawbacks of the use of these technologies.

This volume is not entirely without its flaws. For example, it is noticeably US-centric, with two chapters specifically focused on Facebook, and one each on MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter. While these sites all have international user bases, they are all based in, and reflect the cultural assumptions of, the US. While these studies all make important contributions to the topic of the networked self, the collection might have benefitted from the inclusion of at least one study of an SNS with a large population of users outside the US. This would allow interesting comparisons between practices that seem ubiquitous in the US with those of other cultures, and would therefore also strengthen this collection's stated focus on community and culture. As it stands, readers will have to look elsewhere for international studies of SNSs.

Similarly, the studies in this collection focus overwhelmingly on college students and younger adults. This, too, is in keeping with the demographic trends of SNS usage, which was primarily a youth activity, particularly in the timeframe in which most of the data in these studies were collected, circa 2007–8. However, the years after 2008 saw a sharp rise in the number of adults over 30 who started to use SNSs, and it would seem useful

for this volume to have included at least one study on that population, for the reasons stated above. To be fair, the two chapters focused on political communication and SNS usage both had older study populations, but that might also be a reflection of the type of activity being studied.

Overall, this volume offers a carefully chosen selection of scholarship from some of the leading researchers in this area. Given the focus on interaction in SNSs, the book will be of greatest interest to communication and media scholars, and it would make an excellent addition to graduate-level seminars on new media, with selected chapters also being of potential use for upper-division undergraduate courses.

Reference

Madden M and Zickuhr K (2011) 65% of online adults use social networking sites. Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Social-Networking-Sites/Overview.aspx>.

Miyase Christensen, André Jansson and Christian Christensen (eds), *Online Territories: Globalization, Mediated Practice and Social Space*. New York: Peter Lang, 2011. xiii + 302 pp. ISBN 9781433107979, \$129.95 (pbk)

Reviewed by: Rowan Wilken, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

Online Territories is an edited collection that seeks to provide a detailed account of contemporary research into diverse facets of computer-mediated communication and social interaction. The ‘central rationale’ for the book, as the editors see it, is driven by the need ‘for further, research-based contextualization of [and critical interventions into] preexisting theories related with, for example, globalization, mobility, citizenship and civic participation, socio-spatial dynamics and network society’ (p. 1).

This ambitious agenda is pursued via two angles of approach: (1) an understanding of ‘online practices and spaces not as distinct and isolated pursuits’, but as closely tied to everyday, offline milieus (p. 2); and (2) that any account of ‘online territories must account for the interplay between situated individual and social practice, and global processes’ (p. 2). As such, *Online Territories* can be situated within, and makes strong contributions to, at least three strands of existing scholarship: that which is dedicated to challenging the ‘romanticizing attributes associated with the online’ (p. xi) that were characteristic of early, especially techno-boosterist, internet commentary; that which is concerned with critically reevaluating globalization (especially ‘deterritorialization’) discourses by, among other things, highlighting the importance of bringing ‘the social logics of boundary making, maintenance and negotiation clearly into the vision of contemporary (online) media studies’ (p. 2); and, finally, that which is concerned with mapping the ‘ever-growing popularity of online communications’ and the ‘diverse and complex shapes’ (p. 1) that these social interactions take.

The collection is organized into three thematic sections, each with its own short introduction. The first, entitled ‘Everyday Intersections’, echoes the sentiments of other critics that the internet is now an embedded part of our lives and that, as they ‘enter the realm of the banal, they become significant sources for social and economic change’ (p. 10). Contributions in this section explore: US soldiers’ use of YouTube in the ‘construction,