

Book reviews

Edited by Vincent Mosco
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Recent advancements in information technology are leading to the emergence of “The Next Internet”, a global network that consists of Cloud Computing, Big Data and the Internet of Things. *Becoming Digital* investigates the impact of The Next Internet on society, politics, economy and culture. The book discusses emerging challenges of the new digital reality and looks at possible ways of addressing them. While Mosco heralds the arrival of The Next Internet as inexorable, he also calls for using its potential *pro publico bono* to ensure that people exercise control over the technology and not the other way round. The book is a succinct and thought-provoking account of life in an increasingly digitalised world.

Chapter 1 provides a roadmap to the rest of the book, setting reader expectations and summarising the main concepts influencing this Next Internet. It begins with a historical overview of developments that led to the emergence of Cloud Computing – the cornerstone of The Next Internet. Mosco explains the significance of key digital forces – represented by Big Tech (the world’s most influential technological companies) – and their impact on shaping the reality that we live in. Despite the potential of The Next Internet to expand democracy, empower people and advance social equality, it currently serves as a tool for the ongoing commodification and militarisation of the world. In order to understand the digital world, Mosco encourages us to see it through the prism of political power and cultural studies. I have found Chapter 1 to be a good introduction with clear explanations of key concepts covered in the book and rational justification of author’s analytical approach.

The interplay between technology and society is the topic of Chapter 2. With the advent of ubiquitous computing, we are undergoing what Mosco describes as an “ontological shift” in human–machine relationships. The number of devices connected to the internet that gather our personal data is growing exponentially. To put things into perspective, readers are provided with a forecast on the growth in the number of Internet of Things devices and their financial impact. The unprecedented volumes of data give way to digital relativism, an approach which substitutes human knowledge with predictive algorithms. We are warned that by excessive reliance on predictive algorithms we can ultimately cede control over our decisions. The message of Chapter 2 is apt as it challenges the belief in infallibility of Big Data Analytics and encourages readers to go beyond considering the problem at the black-box level.

Moving on, Chapter 3 discusses the global power relations in the digital world. Mosco highlights the connection between Silicon Valley (represented by the “Big Five”, i.e. Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google and Microsoft) and the government agencies of the USA. As the global technological dominance of America grows, China remains the only contender with a realistic ability to challenge it. Readers are provided with financial figures that serve as a good illustration of how powerful and influential the Big Five have become. The chapter also offers interesting insights into China’s endeavours to protect their digital market and provide a counterbalance to the Big Five. It is illuminating to see how both countries differ in their relationship with major technology companies and apply different strategies to regulate them.

Chapter 4 explores how the progress of digitalisation transforms what it means to be human both on a personal and societal level. Mosco argues that Big Tech is turning people into marketable commodities, stacks of data points that are progressively losing control over their bodies and social relationships.

Becoming Digital: Toward a Post-Internet Society

Of particular interest are several anecdotes that serve as a warning against modern slavery by illustrating the impact of gig economy on individuals' lives. The chapter also introduces two evocative myths, i.e. "singularity", the state of machines and humans becoming merged, and "machines becoming alive". Both myths are potent and complement each other as they illustrate two parallel processes; machines becoming like humans, and humans becoming more machine like. Chapter 4 encourages reflection on what it means to be human. Given the fast pace of technological advances that we witness around us nowadays, this is a fundamental question which merits deeper thought.

The impact of The Next Internet on the environment, warfare and employment is presented in Chapter 5. Piling heaps of digital waste, autonomous killing machines and robots that can outperform humans in an increasing number of areas have become reality. Mosco also discusses the concept of privacy, an indispensable human right, which, in the digital world, has become a tradable commodity. In order to sensitise the reader to the problem, some examples of how personal data are used by social networks are provided. In the light of recent data breach scandals involving Cambridge Analytica, the urge to exercise greater control over personal data is particularly timely.

In order to deal with the challenges created by Next Internet, Chapter 6 suggests activism, increased social engagement and grass root initiatives. Mosco presents some concrete measures, including law regulations aimed at

breaking up the Big Five monopoly, the introduction of a people-centred business culture and active social engagement. The author calls for more HCI experts to be trained, which is sensible given that the relationship, and nature, of interactions between humans and machines is poised to change in the near future. Readers are encouraged to take a stand to make sure that we are subjects rather than objects of the new digital world. The message of the final chapter resonates strongly as a reminder that our reality is shaped by actions that we take on a day-to-day basis.

Becoming Digital makes a compelling argument for digital citizenship in a democratic, decentralised Next Internet. I found the book thought-provoking and informative. The writing is easy to follow and the issues addressed are timely, yet frequently overlooked. In addition, a "further reading" list is provided which may be of interest to those who would like to learn more about digital technology. Although I was expecting to see a chapter on the implications of the Next Internet for human cognitive processing abilities and a more in-depth discussion on ethics, I understand that the coverage of these topics was constrained due to space limitations. Nonetheless, I would recommend *Becoming Digital* to anyone looking for a good overview of Next Internet with its challenges and potential solutions.

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Digital Technologies and Generational Identity ICT Usage Across the Life Course

Edited by Taipale S. Wilksa T.A. and Gilleard C.

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For a researcher newly introduced to the multitude of literatures that attempt to document the evolving relationship between individuals, societies and digital technology

the familiar cycles of a conceptual framework rising and falling from academic grace may appear to move at a breakneck pace when compared to other fields in the wider social sciences. No sooner had young people become "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) aiding the "resistant" older generation than the construction was lambasted (i.e. Helsper and Eynon, 2010) and rejected. This offering by Taipale, Wilksa and Gilleard (2018) provides a useful insight to the new and seasoned researcher alike, drawing together work from